

# Rethinking Palestinian Iconoclasm

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## 1995–2015: Twenty Years of Iconoclasm

Archaeological exploration of the Christian cult landscape of the former Byzantine provinces of Arabia and Palaestina is fast approaching its bicentenary.<sup>1</sup> The region has received intensive and long-running survey attention from archaeologists, and material originating from research conducted in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries still represents a major component of what is currently known of Christian communities in the region before the year 1000. Perhaps because of this long tradition, scholars engaged in the excavation of churches in the region have remained resistant to the major critical revolutions in archaeological excavation and recording that have shaped, and now characterize, research into comparable structures in other regions of the former Roman world. Byzantinists in particular have proved surprisingly slow to move beyond treating mosaic floors as the most significant and informative component of archaeological material relating to churches within the region.

1 By Palaestina, I am referring to the three provinces of Palaestina Prima, Secunda, and Tertia, an area spanning approximately the borders of modern Israel, the Palestinian territories, and Jordan. Throughout the article I have adopted the place names and spellings as they most commonly appear in the available published literature for individual churches and sites (thus Ein Hanniya rather than 'Ayn Hanniya). This is to aid readers in identifying the various sites in question and for ease in cross-referencing, rather than a reflection of my own personal views of naming conventions in the region.

Mosaics frequently remain foregrounded in current excavation and recording strategies, often at the expense of more rigorous observations of chronology or phasing.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, mosaics comprise a major component of the available published material on church structures throughout the region. Some positive results of this trend may be identified. For archaeologists and historians exploring the transition from Byzantine to Umayyad political rule, mosaics, and their accompanying inscriptions, have proved central to the recent recognition of prolonged patterns of church building in Arabia and Palaestina into the 780s.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the

2 Major exceptions include the recent excavations at Jabal Harun and Deir Ain Abata. For Jabal Harun see Z. T. Fiema and J. Frösén, *Petra—The Mountain of Aaron* (Helsinki, 2008) and for Deir Ain Abata, K. D. Politis, *The Sanctuary of Lot at Deir 'Ain 'Abata* (Athens, 2012).

3 The latest securely dated example appears to be that of Khirbet es-Shubeika, dated by Vasilios Tzaferis to either 785 or 801/2. Leah Di Segni prefers the earlier date, which appears to complement the chronological range of other dedications in Palaestina and Arabia, which extend into the 770s at Madaba (767) and Mar Elyas (776). See V. Tzaferis, "The Greek Inscriptions from the Church at Khirbet es-Shubeika," in *One Land—Many Cultures: Archaeological Studies in Honour of Stanislaw Loffreda OFM*, ed. G. Claudio-Bottini, L. Di Segni, and L. Daniel Chrupcala (Jerusalem, 2003), 83–86. A brief report on the excavations of Khirbet es-Shubeika is offered in D. Syon, "A Church from the Early Islamic Period at Khirbet es-Shubeika," in Claudio-Bottini, Di Segni, and Chrupcala, *One Land—Many Cultures*, 75–82. The dating of the scheme at the Church of the Theotokos, Madaba, is discussed in L. Di Segni, "The Date of the Church of the Virgin at Madaba," *Lib.ann.* 42 (1992):

redating of known mosaic programs, or the new discovery of schemes (mosaic ensembles) commissioned after the Arab conquest (ca. 636–ca. 642), still remains the primary means by which such continuities are identified and charted in the present day.<sup>4</sup>

251–57. For the short report on Mar Elyas, which has not been fully published, see M. Piccirillo, “The Province of Arabia during the Persian Invasion (613–629/630),” in *Shaping the Middle East: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in an Age of Transition, 400–800 C.E.*, ed. K. Holum and H. Lapin (Bethesda, MD, 2011), 109. The inscription is reproduced in full in L. Di Segni, “Varia Arabica: Greek Inscriptions from Jordan,” *Lib.ann* 56 (2006): 579–80. The latest dated inscription in Palaestina currently proposed by scholars is possibly to be found in the Church of the Kathisma and may date to the 820s. This date is based entirely on the identification of the mosaic’s donor, “Basilios,” as the incumbent Patriarch of Jerusalem known to have been active in the 820s, which is not explicit in the dedication. An alternative date of around the 740s, also proposed by Leah Di Segni, remains equally plausible. A date in the 820s would make it the first dedication in a rural church in Palaestina for over forty years (after Khirbet es-Shubeika in 785), and is difficult to harmonize with the prevalent patterns of church abandonment in the region that may be observed in the ninth century. For the inscription see L. Di Segni, “A Greek Inscription in the Kathisma Church,” in Claudio-Bottini, Di Segni, and Chrupcala, *One Land—Many Cultures*, 248–50. For a discussion of abandonment rates among monasteries and some cult churches between the eighth and tenth centuries see D. Reynolds, “Monasticism and Christian Pilgrimage in Early Islamic Palestine c. 614–c. 950” (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2014), 284–309. A possible repair to the Church of Hagios Konstantinos in Rihab, dated to 832, has been identified by Leah Di Segni but should also remain tentative; see Di Segni, “Varia Arabica,” 578–79.

4 Excavations sensitive to post-Byzantine phases at the sites of Jabal Harun, the churches of Pella, and the church on Mount Berenike in Tiberias offer some exceptional examples of churches where Umayyad phases have been identified without the presence of dated post-Byzantine inscriptions. The final report for the church of Jabal Harun has appeared in Fiema and Frösén, *Petra*, with the main discussion of phasing in E. Mikkola, A. Lahelma, Z. Fiema, and R. Holmgren, “The Church and the Chapel: Dating and Phasing,” in Fiema and Frösén, *Petra*, 99–176. The churches of Pella are addressed in R. H. Smith, “The Byzantine Period,” in *Pella in Jordan*, vol. 2, *The Second Interim Report of the Joint University of Sydney and College of Wooster Excavations at Pella 1982–1985*, ed. A. McNicoll (London, 1992), 145–81 and A. Walmsley and R. Smith, “The Islamic Period,” in McNicoll, *Pella in Jordan* 2, 183–98. Those of Hippos/Sussita have yet to be published in final form, but useful preliminary reports may be consulted in A. Seagal, “The South-East Church, the Cathedral,” in *Hippos-Sussita, 4th Season of Excavations*, June–July 2003, ed. A. Seagal et al. (Haifa, 2003), 21–23; J. Młynarczyk and M. Burdajewicz, “North-West Church Complex,” in *Hippos-Sussita, 7th Season of Excavations*, July 2006, ed. A. Seagal et al. (Haifa, 2006), 47–59; M. Schuler, “North-East Church Complex,” in Seagal et al., *Hippos-Sussita, 7th Season*, 66–78; J. Młynarczyk

In this light, it is unsurprising that recent years have witnessed a rising interest in the phenomenon of “Palestinian iconoclasm,” the systematic removal of images of humans and animals from the floor mosaics of churches by the picking out, scrambling, or replacing of their constituent tesserae (fig. 1). Often interpreted as an indicator of continued Christian activity at church sites, or a response to the changing political and religious discourse heralded by the Umayyad regime, studies of mosaic iconoclasm remain the most common of our attempts to understand transitions in the use of Christian liturgical space in the post-Byzantine Levant.<sup>5</sup> Because Palestinian iconoclasm provides one of the few windows into Christian communal life in

and M. Burdajewicz, “North-West Church Complex,” in *Hippos-Sussita, 8th Season of Excavations, July 2007*, ed. A. Seagal et al. (Haifa, 2007), 61–71; M. Schuler, “North-East Church Complex,” in Seagal et al., *Hippos-Sussita, 8th Season*, 77–91; J. Młynarczyk and M. Burdajewicz, “North-West Church Complex,” in *Hippos-Sussita, 9th Season of Excavations, June–July 2008*, ed. A. Seagal et al. (Haifa, 2008), 62–71; and M. Schuler “North-East Church Complex,” in Seagal et al., *Hippos-Sussita, 9th Season*, 40–53; M. Schuler, “North-East Church Complex,” in *Hippos-Sussita, 10th Season of Excavations, July and September 2009*, ed. A. Seagal et al. (Haifa, 2009), 64–73. The final report for the church on Mount Berenike has appeared in Y. Hirschfeld, *Excavations at Tiberias, 1989–1994* (Jerusalem, 2004).

5 S. Ognibene, “The Iconophobic Dossier,” in *Mount Nebo: New Archaeological Excavations 1967–1997*, ed. M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata (Jerusalem, 1998), 372–89; eadem, *La chiesa di Santo Stefano ad Umm al-Rasas: Il problema iconofobico* (Rome, 2002); A. Shiyyab, *Der Islam und der Bilderstreit in Jordanien und Palästina: Archäologische und kunstgeschichtliche Untersuchungen unter besonder Berücksichtigung der “Kirche von Ya’amun”* (Munich, 2006); L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: The Sources (ca. 680–850)* (Aldershot, 2001), 30–36; eidem, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca. 680–850): A History* (Cambridge 2011), 105–17, 232–34. This argument has appeared more recently in L. Brubaker, “Making and Breaking Images and Meaning in Byzantium and Early Islam,” in *Striking Images: Iconoclasm Past and Present*, ed. S. Boldrick, L. Brubaker, and R. Clay (Aldershot, 2013), 21–22; G. Bowersock, *Mosaics as History: The Near East from Late Antiquity to Islam* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 92–111; R. Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study* (Princeton, NJ, 1995), 180–219; E. Ribak, *Religious Communities in Byzantine Palaestina: The Relationship Between Judaism, Christianity and Islam, AD 400–700*, British Archaeological Reports International Series 1646 (Oxford, 2007), 33–34; idem, “Archaeological Evidence from the Byzantine Holy Land on the Origins of the Iconoclastic Movement,” *JBAA* 165 (2012): 1–21; H. Maguire, “Moslems, Christians, and Iconoclasm: Erasures from Church Floor Mosaics during the Early Islamic Period,” in *Byzantine Art: Recent Studies; Essays in Honor of Lois Drewer*, ed. C. Hourihane (Tempe, AZ, 2011), 111–19.





Fig. 1. Kastron Mefa'a, Hagios Stephanos, Jordan. Excised and scrambled detail of a bird. (Unless otherwise noted, photos and maps are by the author.)

the early Islamic period beyond straightforward observations of its survival, a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon continues to be fundamental to establishing a more refined sense of Christian life in the Caliphate following 700.

Although the speed of publications dedicated to Palestinian iconoclasm continues to gather pace, twenty years of debate following Robert Schick's seminal 1995 study—the first to systematically tackle the corpus of iconoclast mosaics—have not achieved consensus about the underlying causes of the phenomenon.<sup>6</sup> Recent

forays into the discussion by Eliya Ribak and Glen Bowersock have voiced renewed support for the edict promulgated by Yazid II (ca. 723),<sup>7</sup> a position robustly countered by the arguments of Leslie Brubaker, John Haldon, and Susanna Ognibene, who, based on the well-known apologetic treatise of Theodore Abu Qurrah, view the phenomenon as an internal Christian dispute generated by growing sensitivity to Islamic belief.<sup>8</sup> Henry Maguire's recent linking of the

7 This is the date advocated by Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, 104–5. The use of Yazid's edict has also emerged more recently in J. Herrin, "What Caused Iconoclasm," *JEH* 65, no. 4 (2014): 864.

8 Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: History*, 232–34. Susanna Ognibene views the phenomenon as a response to the accommodation of Muslim worshippers in church space: *La chiesa di Santo Stefano*, 139–40.

6 Noted in the recent article by R. Schick, "The Destruction of Images in Eighth-Century Palestine," in *Age of Transition: Byzantine Culture in the Islamic World*, ed. H. C. Evans (New Haven, 2015), 132–41.

phenomenon to the Byzantine iconomachy disputes of the period ca. 720–843 has added a layer of complexity to the dispute.<sup>9</sup>

These positions are by now sufficiently entrenched that debate is approaching a standstill. Indeed, the general points of consensus among scholars about Palestinian iconoclasm have arguably shifted little since Schick's original observations more than twenty years ago, and they exhibit little sign of immediate movement. This discord is generated in part by recent methodological approaches to the surviving evidence of Palestinian iconoclasm itself. One problem, by no means controversial to specialists of Arabia-Palaestina, concerns the role that literary works continue to assume in establishing the parameters of debate among archaeologists. Although its example is not unique, Palestinian iconoclasm encapsulates this issue, given that current disagreements among scholars over its origins are commonly driven by alternative interpretations of texts, rather than divergent readings of what may be extracted from the published archaeological record. For a phenomenon identified only through excavation, debates among Byzantinists or specialists of the Umayyad Caliphate have proved far less inclined to recognize the agency of archaeological data relating to Palestinian iconoclasm and the types of questions and answers that it elicits independently of the written word. Quite the opposite, in fact, for archaeology has tended to reside at the periphery of the discourse. Of the eighty-seven iconoclast sites known to us in the present day, theories expounded by the major studies of Palestinian iconoclasm are generally bolstered by the evidence drawn from fewer than ten.<sup>10</sup> Our interpretations of Palestinian iconoclasm, therefore, are proposed, debated, and refuted using a model of analysis that marginalizes almost ninety percent of the known data.

Equally absent in recent discourse are broader attempts to understand how the action of mosaic iconoclasm relates to the wider repertoire of church furnishing—both structural and epigraphic—and the broader social context of church building and design

across the entire region. Consequently, a number of basic questions about the geographical distribution of the phenomenon, its dating, and the identity of its principal agents remain generally unexplored beyond the crudest of parameters. Given that the phenomenon is not explicitly described in any surviving literary source, potential responses to these questions can lie only in the material evidence. This study, therefore, readdresses the current imbalance between text and material by initiating debate about Palestinian iconoclasm from the perspective of the known archaeological corpus, rather than from the few documented episodes of hostility to images in the region.

In what follows, I shall propose that Palestinian iconoclasm was unlikely to have been generated by indiscriminate hostility to the figural image.<sup>11</sup> Rather, when instances of Palestinian iconoclasm are resituated in their wider architectural context, and sites examined with respect to one another, what emerges is a phenomenon concerned primarily with images with perceived connections to idolatry. From this it is possible to draw two further conclusions. First, the weight of evidence suggests that many cases of Palestinian iconoclasm were linked to churches under Chalcedonian episcopal authority.<sup>12</sup> Second, and in view of this Chalcedonian connection, Palestinian iconoclasm has little direct relation to Islamic legislative or social pressure, nor to generally held notions of Islamic aniconism. Rather, it reflects an internal debate within the Chalcedonian community, one likely centered on reinforcing and establishing the centrality of the Orthodox sacred image. In essence, Palestinian iconoclasm may be understood as a highly localized and short-lived expression of early medieval idoloclasm.

This study begins with a review of the limitations of current debate, before addressing the related issues of intent and causation. What were the basic characteristics of Palestinian iconoclasm in terms of the images, places, and contexts that it affected? I will then address what evidence we possess for identifying the group most actively engaged in neutralizing images seen to be aberrant. Reaching these conclusions is less straightforward than it first appears, for many of the data sets we

9 Maguire, "Moslems, Christians, and Iconoclasm," 117–19.

10 Thus the arguments of Henry Maguire and Susanna Ognibene are based upon the single churches of the Church of the Theotokos, Madaba, and the Church of Hagios Stephanos respectively; see n. 5 above. Glen Bowersock's study centers on three examples: Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*. Eliya Ribak's 2007 study draws upon the evidence of eleven: Ribak, *Religious Communities*, 33–34.

11 In doing so I echo the recent sentiments of Maguire, "Moslems, Christians, and Iconoclasm," 117–18.

12 This was alluded to by Schick, *Christian Communities*, 206, but not developed further.



possess for Palestinian iconoclasm predate the advances in “early Islamic” archaeological research since the early 1980s and remain bound up in the enduring methodologies of “Christian archaeology” and antiquarianism. A review of these legacies will be undertaken in the course of this study, even if many of their issues can only be raised rather than resolved. Still, they must be acknowledged if we are to appreciate the overwhelming influence of established archaeological methodologies on both the direction of discourse about Palestinian iconoclasm and the creation of areas that we cannot (and may never) discuss beyond the most rudimentary of terms. We shall turn to these issues now.

### Palestinian Iconoclasm: Frontiers of Debate

Cases where images were removed from floor mosaics and subsequently replaced by rearranging existing tesserae, or inserting cruder limestone substitutes, have been known to archaeologists for decades.<sup>13</sup> Yet it was not until the publication of Robert Schick’s seminal study in 1995 that the phenomenon garnered attention as a subject deserving of independent critical reflection.<sup>14</sup> Schick’s considered observations of the sensitivity and care with which the offending images were censored were formative in identifying “Palestinian iconoclasm” as a phenomenon indebted to the agency of Christians, rather than the “Arab occupants” to whom such interventions had traditionally been credited.<sup>15</sup> The corpus of church sites where iconoclastic activity has been identified has since grown, but the general parameters of Schick’s observations—that this activity was undertaken by the Christian users of the church—continue to hold sway. In this respect, Schick’s qualifications

have proved central to the recognition of Christian activity during the Umayyad period at church sites excavated and published before archaeologists devoted systematic attention to exploring post-Byzantine occupational levels.<sup>16</sup> The refined dating of the phenomenon to the period ca. 720–ca. 760 first proposed by Susanna Ognibene, based on comparisons between the mosaic schemes of Deir el-Addas (completed in 722) and the “Theotokos Chapel” of Ayn al-Kanisah (completed in 762), has added further nuance to this debate since 1995.<sup>17</sup>

General consensus regarding the developments that motivated such interventions and the terminology used by scholars to identify and label the phenomenon has remained less straightforward to achieve. Current explanations for Palestinian iconoclasm may be broadly categorized into three distinct theories which have produced three main factions of support among active scholars.<sup>18</sup>

The first, revisited most recently by Glen Bowersock and Eliya Ribak, is that Palestinian iconoclasm reflects a direct response to the edict issued by the Caliph Yazid II in the 720s, which demanded the removal of images from buildings within the Caliphate.<sup>19</sup> Although widely accepted in early scholarship dealing with Palestinian iconoclasm, more recent studies, drawing attention to the limited number of Islamic Arabic accounts attesting to an edict issued by Yazid, have contributed to a fairly widespread, but by no means total, dismissal of the first of these theories by most scholars in the field.<sup>20</sup>

13 One of the earliest observations of iconoclasm, published in 1897, relates to the “Map Church” of Madaba; see M. J. Lagrange, “La mosaïque géographique de Madaba,” *RevBibl* 6 (1897): 165–84.

14 Schick, *Christian Communities*, 209–10. Schick’s analysis heralded the emergence of a number of studies, outlined in n. 5 above.

15 For examples of earlier studies that attributed this damage to Arabs or Muslims, often as a result of the policy of Yazid II, see J. W. Crowfoot, “The Christian Churches,” in *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis*, ed. C. H. Kraeling (New Haven, CT, 1938), 172–73. The interventions at Kursi have also been attributed to Arab squatter occupation rather than seen as a product of “Palestinian iconoclasm.” This may be due to the apparent lack of repairs to the mosaic, although plates reproduced in the report may suggest that the cavities were repaired with lime mortar. See V. Tzaferis, “The Excavations of Kursi-Gergesa,” *Atiqot* 16 (Jerusalem, 1983): pl. 9, 5–6.

16 This is true of churches at sites such as Rihab and also those of Gerasa. See M. Avi-Yonah, “Greek Christian Inscriptions from Rihab,” *QDAP* 13 (1948): 68–72 and Crowfoot, “Christian Churches,” 234–55.

17 S. Ognibene, “Iconophobic Dossier,” 109–16.

18 In a more recent review, Robert Schick remains unconvinced by the major theories; see Schick, “Destruction of Images,” 141.

19 As represented by Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, 91–111. Bowersock surveys the varying opinions on the specific date when the edict was ostensibly issued. His own conclusions strike a balance between the existence of the edict and possible accommodation of Muslim worshippers within church space.

20 Most recently voiced in Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: History*, 114. Their arguments are based on the observations of Schick, *Christian Communities*, 215–17. Shiyyab, *Der Islam*, 224–25, is similarly unconvinced of the existence of an edict attributable to Yazid II. An earlier critique of the edict and its links with Byzantine iconoclasm appears in S. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*

A second argument, maintained by Leslie Brubaker, Juan Signes Codoñer, John Haldon, and Sidney Griffith, attributes the interventions to the growing influence of Muslim antipathy to images among Christian communities.<sup>21</sup> As a result, explanations for Palestinian iconoclasm since the 1990s have met with slightly more consensus on ideas of syncretic interaction between Muslims and Christians, or the influence of internal responses to “Islam” within the Christian community. Two strands of argument have emerged from this particular interpretation. The older, but still influential, theory emerged from straightforward comparisons between Palestinian iconoclasm and the non-figural mosaic programs commissioned at the Dome of the Rock and Mosque of Damascus in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. Thus Palestinian iconoclasm is seen as closely aligned with the aniconic decorative traditions of Islam, which are considered to have gained greater coherency following the reign of Abd al-Malik (685–705).<sup>22</sup> To this particular strand of

during the Reign of Leo III: With Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources, CSCO 49 (Louvain, 1973), 60–84. An earlier survey of the variant traditions appears in A. Vasiliev, “The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721,” *DOP* 9–10 (1955–56): 23–47.

21 Ognibene, “Iconophobic Dossier,” 372–89; Ognibene, *La chiesa di Santo Stefano*, 119–40; Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: Sources*, 30–36; eidem, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: History*, 105–17; S. H. Griffith, “Images, Islam and Christian Icons: A Moment in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in Early Islamic Times,” in *La Syrie de Byzance à l’Islam, VII<sup>e</sup>–VIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ed. P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais (Damascus, 1992), 134; J. Signes-Codoñer, “Melkites and Icon Worship during the Iconoclastic Period,” *DOP* 67 (2013): 137–45.

22 These parallels have appeared most recently in Herrin, “What Caused Iconoclasm,” 864. The question of an “aniconic” shift in Umayyad representation, notably visible in Abd al-Malik’s epigraphic gold dinar, issued ca. 696/97, and the decorative programs of the Dome of the Rock (probably after ca. 691) and the Mosque of Damascus (neither of which survives in its entirety) continues to excite debate. The apparent shift toward nonfigural representation as a component of the Marwanid-Umayyad public image, as expressed through their coin issues and architectural programs after 690, has traditionally been viewed as a response to contemporary Byzantine developments in the reign of Justinian II; notably the so-called Christus Rex *nomisma* dated (though by no means securely) to the period 685–95. Certainly the minting of the dinar appears to have broken with the established Umayyad protocol of adapting the figural design of earlier and contemporary Byzantine issues. This appears to have accompanied, or been swiftly followed by, a similar adaptation of Byzantine architectural and decorative devices in the embellishment of the Dome of the Rock, and later the Mosque of Damascus. Nonetheless, the broader social

and political context of these reforms remains poorly understood, as does our overall awareness of the social function of Marwanid-Umayyad aniconic programs as part of an ongoing dialogue with Byzantium and, indeed, with the still majority Christian population of the Bilad al-Sham into the early eighth century. One thing is very clear, however, and that is that the shift toward nonfigural representation in mosques and coins was not mirrored in the apparently more “secular” construction of the “desert palaces” that continued to be commissioned throughout the early eighth century, probably by members of the Umayyad family. Here it is again worth stressing the contextual nature of Marwanid-Umayyad and Muslim attitudes to figural representation, which in any case we can observe only through the actions of a single ruling family. The possibility that attitudes toward figural representation among converts or Muslims of lower social status exhibited greater variation and ambiguity requires more considered reflection elsewhere. That mosaic iconoclasm in churches formed part of a much more pervasive concern about representation, both within the Caliphate and in Byzantium, is highly possible, even if we reject a direct correlation between Palestinian iconoclasm and Umayyad decorative trends, and also requires further consideration. An important comparative discussion of the problem of representation ca. 680–ca. 830 appears in L. Brubaker, “Representation c. 800: Arab, Byzantine, Carolingian,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 19 (2009): 37–55. A useful comparative discussion of the “aniconic” shift in Umayyad representation appears in S. Blair, “What Is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?,” in *Bayt al-Maqdis: ‘Abd al-Malik’s Jerusalem, Part One*, ed. J. Raby and J. Johns (Oxford, 1992), 59–85. Important discussion of the Dome of the Rock, and its adaptation of earlier designs, also appears in O. Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 70–119 and earlier in idem, “The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem,” *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959): 33–62, and idem, “Islamic Art and Byzantium,” *DOP* 18 (1964): 67–88. For a study of the mosaics in the Mosque of Damascus see F. Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Studies on the Makings of an Umayyad Visual Culture* (Leiden, 2001). Grabar also addressed the ambiguity of early Islamic views in figural art in *The Formation of Islamic Art* (rev. and enlarged ed., New Haven, 1987), 72–98. See the most recent treatment of the theme in F. Flood, “Faith, Religion, and the Material Culture of Early Islam,” in *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*, ed. H. Evans and B. Ratliff (New York, 2012), 244–57 and A. Ballian “Country Estates, Material Culture, and the Celebration of Princely Life: Islamic Art and the Secular Domain,” in Evans and Ratliff, *Byzantium and Islam*, 200–208. On the Umayyad (and pre-Umayyad) adaptation of Byzantine coin issues see J. Walker, *A Catalogue of the Muhammadan Coins in the British Museum: A Catalogue of the Arab-Sassanian Coins* (London, 1941); S. Album and T. Goodwin, “The Pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period,” *Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean Museum* 1 (Oxford, 2002); T. Goodwin, *Arab-Byzantine Coinage, Studies in the Khalili Collection* 4 (London, 2005); and C. Foss, *Arab-Byzantine Coins: An Introduction, With a Catalogue of the Dumbarton Oaks Collection*, Dumbarton Oaks Publications 12 (Washington, DC, 2008). Recent work in the Arab-Byzantine series appears in Tony Goodwin, ed., *Arab-Byzantine Coins and*



argument we shall return. More recent theories, however, partly provoked by the publication and translation of the known writings of the Melkite bishop of Harran, Theodore Abu Qurrah, have drawn upon textual allusions to Muslim aversion to sacred portraiture and icon veneration.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, a recent theory proposed by Henry Maguire has sought to explain the phenomenon of Palestinian iconoclasm with respect to the debates surrounding the first phase of Byzantine iconomachy in the period ca. 720–ca. 787.<sup>24</sup>

These explanations for Palestinian iconoclasm have met with varying degrees of support in recent years although none has yet achieved universal acceptance or full recognition in the field, notably among those involved in acquiring and publishing new archaeological data.<sup>25</sup>

## Context

Much of the criticism to be leveled at current theories arises from the lack of any explicit reference in a surviving written source to the removal of images from mosaic floors. Nowhere in the reports of the “Edict of Yazid” does the tradition explicitly identify the medium of images that were targeted for removal; and the earliest descriptions of the edict, which appear in the acts of the Second Council of Nikaia

(787), are framed, unsurprisingly, in the context of icon veneration.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, Theodore Abu Qurrah’s well-known apologetic treatise extends to a defense only of sacred portraiture, rather than of all forms of figural representation.<sup>27</sup> The particular focus of Yazid’s edict on religious portraiture is also repeated in the later report of Theophanes, which appears to derive from a tradition of common origin.<sup>28</sup> Others, however, such as Michael the Syrian (Chronicle 1234 and Chronicle 819), note that the edict extended to all representations of living creatures, and targeted images in nonreligious buildings, including houses and marketplaces.<sup>29</sup> The lack of evidence for corresponding iconoclastic activity in such buildings in the regions of Arabia and Palaestina, however, should caution against this particular claim, especially if we consider that the elaborate decorative schemes of sites such as Qusayr Amra were being commissioned, if not actively maintained, by the Umayyad family in the same decades as Palestinian iconoclasm.<sup>30</sup> Further, as will be addressed below, there are a number of indications that images in mosaic floors were preserved in areas of churches that were not used in celebrating the liturgical rite, suggesting that attitudes to mosaic images were affected by spatial context even within individual church complexes.

Accordingly, neither the descriptions of iconoclasm presented by the edict of Yazid nor the apology of Theodore Abu Qurrah corresponds well with the known corpus of archaeological evidence relating to Palestinian iconoclasm, which demonstrates only that mundane subjects of animals or people adorning church buildings were subject to erasure.

*History* (Oxford, 2012). See also the comments in L. Treadwell, “Abd al-Malik’s Coinage Reforms: The Role of the Damascus Mint,” *Revue numismatique* 6 (2006): 357–81, who draws attention to the problematic chronologies of the Marwanid-Umayyad issues and their response to Byzantine issues of the same period. A useful contextual discussion also appears in J. Johns, “Archaeology and the History of Early Islam: The First Seventy Years,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 46, no. 4 (2003): 411–36.

23 I. Dick, *Théodore Abuqurra: Traité du culte des icônes (Maymar fi ikram al-ayqunat li-Thawudhurus Abi Qurra)* (Jounieh, 1986). For the English translation see S. Griffith, *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons Written in Arabic by Theodore Abu Qurrah, Bishop of Harran (c. 755–c. 830 A.D.)* (Louvain, 1997). See also S. Griffith, “Theodore Abu Qurrah’s Arabic Tract on the Christian Practice of Venerating Images,” *JAOS* 105 (1985): 53–73.

24 Maguire, “Moslems, Christians, and Iconoclasm,” 118.

25 S. Derfler, “The Byzantine Church at Tel Keriouth and Religious Iconoclasm in the 8th Century,” *Aram* 15 (2003): 39–47 and B. Hamarneh and K. Hinkkanen, “The Mosaic,” in Fiema and J. Frösén, *Petra*, 257–58, both of whom cite Yazid’s edict but are seemingly unaware of the counter-explanations proposed by Leslie Brubaker, John Haldon, and Susanna Ognibene.

26 Mansi 13:196E–200.

27 Griffith, *Treatise*, 28–29.

28 Robert Hoyland considers this to have been the lost chronicle of Theophilos of Edessa; R. Hoyland, *Theophilos of Edessa’s Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, Translated Texts for Historians 57 (Liverpool, 2011), 19–34, 221–22. For careful qualifications to this theory, see the review of Hoyland’s book by A. Papaconstantinou, *Le Muséon* 126 (2013): 459–65.

29 A comparison of all the sources appears in Vasiliev, “Iconoclastic Edict,” 23–47.

30 G. Fowden, *Qusayr Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2004), 142–74.

## Dating

Equally fundamental doubts about current interpretations arise from how we date Palestinian iconoclasm and interpret its physical distribution. Theories that stress its connection to the “Edict of Yazid” have yet to explain satisfactorily the chronological discrepancies between the purported dating of the edict (which, if it existed, must have appeared before his death in 724), its reputed retraction by his immediate successor, and the noted cases of iconoclasm enacted on schemes, such as the basilica of a church in Jabaliyah (laid in 732), that were commissioned almost a decade after Yazid’s death.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, ideas of an “Islamic” influence underlying Palestinian iconoclasm, based on retroactive readings of the concerns of Theodore Abu Qurrah (ca. 750–ca. 823), are hampered by the fact that his writings postdate the archaeological evidence for mosaic iconoclasm by nearly a century.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the latest archaeological date that we can comfortably posit for Palestinian iconoclasm does not extend beyond 762, and there are a number of indications that some episodes of iconoclast activity had already occurred before 750, around the time of Theodore’s birth.<sup>33</sup>

Studies of Christian apologies predating the works of Theodore, which are first attested in the mid-eighth century, have also failed to produce evidence that the use of figural decoration in churches was among the criticisms that Christians felt compelled to defend themselves against this early stage.<sup>34</sup> Critiques of icon veneration are first known from the Syriac disputation of the monk of Bet Hale, dated by Sidney Griffith to the

720s, but any indications that this aversion extended to the kinds of mundane subjects targeted by “Palestinian iconoclasts” noted earlier are undetectable in sources of this period.<sup>35</sup> Rather, the basic concerns that appear to have characterized the earliest phase of Christian-Muslim theological discourse were disputes concerning the Christological doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity.<sup>36</sup> Neither can we discount that both the disputation of Bet Hale and the apology of Theodore Abu Qurrah are products of the northern Jazira, and may not reflect the concerns of Christian groups in Arabia or Palaestina. Our understanding of Palestinian iconoclasm must, therefore, acknowledge that trends of assimilation with, or resistance to, Islamic practices were unlikely to have been regionally or temporally uniform among the broader Christian population of the Levant.

## Geography

Geographically speaking, the phenomenon’s distribution urges equal caution, for the heavy concentration of iconoclast activity in the regions of Palaestina and Arabia contradicts any impression of universalized Umayyad legislative or social pressure in the form of edicts such as Yazid’s. Cases comparable with Palestinian iconoclasm are unknown in the environs of either Damascus or Harran, a matter made all the more interesting by the survival of figural mosaic schemes in churches around the northern Jund Dimashq and Jund Hims which markedly resemble those schemes in Arabia-Palaestina that were subjected to iconoclast intervention.<sup>37</sup> Only a single example, the church

31 For a brief discussion see J.-B. Humbert, “The Rivers of Paradise in the Byzantine Church near Jabaliyah-Gaza,” in *The Madaba Map Centenary 1897–1997: Travelling through the Byzantine Umayyad Period*, ed. M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata (Jerusalem, 1999), 216–18, pl. 9.

32 The best treatment of the biography of Theodore Abu Qurrah remains J. Lamoreaux, “The Biography of Theodore Abu Qurrah Revisited,” *DOP* 56 (2002): 25–40.

33 This date derives largely from the mosaic of the “Theotokos Chapel” of Ayn al-Kanisah; see M. Piccirillo, “Le due iscrizioni della Capella della Theotokos nel Wadi Ayn al-Kanisah—Monte Nebo,” *Lib.ann* 44 (1994): 527–30.

34 Some early criticisms (although not securely dated or provenanced) are surveyed in S. Bashear, “Qibla Musharriqa and Early Muslim Prayer in Churches,” *The Muslim World* 81, nos. 3–4 (1991): 278–79. These again, however, extend only to sacred icons and do not exhibit a similar widespread concern for anthropomorphic or zoomorphic imagery.

35 S. Griffith, “Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bêt Hālê and a Muslim Emir,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3, no. 1 (2000): 44. This is also discussed in idem, “Images, Islam and Christian Icons,” 120–37.

36 The earliest of these to appear in Arabic is a work known to modern scholars as *On the Triune Nature of God*. This is dated by Sidney Griffith to 755 and Mark Swanson to 788. See the discussion in S. H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque* (Princeton, NJ, 2008), 89–90, n. 47; S. K. Samir, “The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity (c. 750),” in *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period*, ed. S. Samir and J. Nielsen (Leiden, 1991), 57–114; and M. Swanson, “Some Considerations for the Dating of Fī taṭlīḡallāh al-wāḥid (Sin. ar. 154) and Al-ḡāmi wuḡūh al-imān (London, British Library or. 4950),” *Parole de l’Orient* 18 (1993): 115–41.

37 This includes the church of Deir al-Addas; see P. Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises byzantines de la Syrie et du Liban: Décor, archéologie et liturgie* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1988), 45–53.

of Nabgha in northern Syria, in the hinterlands of Manbij, contradicts this general pattern.<sup>38</sup>

This observation also appears true of Egypt, where similar evidence for iconoclasm in Christian cult buildings is visibly lacking. Why the geographical distribution of Palestinian iconoclasm does not extend to regions closer to the ruling Umayyad family or other territories of the Caliphate has never been asked.

Despite each of these flaws, the majority of studies since 1995 have continued the attempt to establish a relationship between the surviving historical traditions and what may be observed of Palestinian iconoclasm purely through excavation. Generally speaking, debates have revolved around the question of *which* of the documented accounts offer the most plausible complement to the archaeological data (rather than whether they can at all), often to the extent that many of the discrepancies between textual accounts and the material remains of Palestinian iconoclasm listed above have been unintentionally sidestepped. The ongoing discovery of “iconoclast” churches continues to add to this issue, rather than provoking a systematic review of our basic approach to the material and its (seemingly) related textual dossier.<sup>39</sup>

Our tendency to overlook the more incompatible features of textually-driven theories with the archaeological evidence has also created something of a gulf between how we approach and evaluate the archaeological evidence for iconoclasm and how we identify its potential ideological origins through the surviving historical corpus. Archaeological analysis of Palestinian iconoclasm has remained steadfastly true to the micro-cosmic antiquarian method. Churches showing evidence for iconoclasm are often published in isolation and discussed only in terms of forensic (often panel-by-panel) descriptions of their extant mosaic schemes and designs. Such an isolationist approach to the material evidence for iconoclasm markedly contrasts to our approach to

the textual sources. Whereas archaeologists have championed focused case studies on individual and primarily rural, non-elite, sites, textual historians have adopted the broader perspective on the surviving written sources emanating from the ranks of the ecclesiastical elite or Yazid’s edict, and are largely concerned with the activities of their particular social stratum or of the ruling Caliphal family. What has emerged is an essentially polarized model for evaluating Palestinian iconoclasm.

A synthetic position that would produce a more coherent portrait of “iconoclastic” communities, by comparing all examples known through excavation, remains noticeably lacking within the debate. As a result, further questions regarding how individual iconoclast churches relate to one another, which images were generally targeted, and why the phenomenon appears so regionally concentrated have yet to be asked. It is in the interest of mapping the contours of this middle ground that the following discussion proceeds. It begins first with the questions of the geographical distribution of iconoclasm and its impact upon the internal church environment.

## Defining Palestinian Iconoclasm: Distribution and Impact

### *Geographical Distribution*

Eighty-seven iconoclast churches are known in varying degrees of detail from archaeological research, and currently indicate that mosaic iconoclasm was limited almost exclusively to the regions formerly covered by the provinces of Byzantine Arabia and Palaestina, with the sites of Suhmata (around twenty-five kilometers northeast of ‘Akka) and Jabal Harun (near Petra) representing the northern and southern extent of iconoclastic activity currently identified (table 1).<sup>40</sup> A single example from Nabgha, located in the hinterlands of Manbij, contradicts this general pattern.<sup>41</sup> The east–west extent of iconoclast activity goes from the rural settlement of Khirbet al-Samra, in the eastern Transjordan; and two examples flanking the Mediterranean coast: at Jabaliyah

38 R. Sabbagh et al., *Le Martyrion Saint-Jean dans la moyenne vallée de l’Euphrate: Fouilles de la Direction Générale des Antiquités à Nabgha au nord-est de Jarablus*, Documents d’archéologie syrienne 13 (Damascus, 2008).

39 Among the most recent discoveries of iconoclast churches is the church of Ya’amun in modern Jordan, excavated between 1999 and 2003 and published in 2011. For a short report on the church see M. Nassar and N. Turshan, “Geometrical Mosaic Pavements of the Church of the Bishop Leontios at Ya’amun (Northern Jordan),” *PEQ* 143 (2011): 41–62. Sites such as these have yet to be systematically incorporated into the debates about Palestinian iconoclasm.

40 On the church at Suhmata see M. Avi-Yonah, “The Byzantine Church at Suhmata,” *QDAP* 3, no. 2 (1933): 92–105. The interventions of Jabal Harun are discussed and photographed in Hamarneh and Hinkkanen, “Mosaic,” 247–62.

41 Sabbagh et al., *Le Martyrion Saint-Jean*.

Table 1. Iconoclast churches known in 2015.

No.	Site	Modern State	Site Name	Byzantine Province	Date of Mosaic Scheme	Bishop
1	Al-Quwaysmah	Jordan	Lower Church	Palaestina II	717/18	
2	Al-Quwaysmah	Jordan	Hagios Kyriakos	Palaestina II		
3	Anab al-Kebir	Israel, Palestine	Hagios Thomas	Palaestina I		
4	Ayn al-Kanisah	Jordan	“Theotokos Chapel”	Arabia	6th century and 762	Job
5	Bahan	Israel, Palestine		Palaestina I		
6	Dariya	Jordan	Hagioi Kosmas and Damianos	Palaestina II		Kasseios
7	Deir as-Sina	Jordan		Palaestina II		
8	Ein Hanniyah	Israel, Palestine		Palaestina I		
9	Emmaus	Israel, Palestine	North Church	Palaestina I		
10	Esbounta (Hesban)	Jordan	North Church	Arabia		
11	Farah el-Hashmiya	Jordan		Arabia		
12	Gaza-Jabaliyah	Israel, Palestine		Palaestina I	Multi-phase 497–732	Markianos
13	Gerasa	Jordan	Bishop Isaiah	Arabia	559	Isaiah
14	Gerasa	Jordan	“Cathedral Church”	Arabia		Paul, Marianos
15	Gerasa	Jordan	Hagios Georgios	Arabia	529/30	Paul
16	Gerasa	Jordan	Hagioi Petros and Paulos	Arabia		
17	Gerasa	Jordan	Hagios Prokopios	Arabia	526	Paul
18	Gerasa	Jordan	Mortuary Church	Arabia		
19	Gerasa	Jordan	Synagogue Church	Arabia	530/31	Paul
20	Gerasa-Zaghrif	Jordan	Hagia Sophia	Arabia	542/43	Paul
21	Herodium		East Church	Palaestina I		
22	Horvat Hani	Israel, Palestine		Palaestina I		
23	Horvat Hanot	Israel, Palestine		Palaestina I	563/64, 578/79, 593/94, or 608/9	
24	Hufa	Jordan		Palaestina II		
25	Jabal Harun	Jordan	“Hagios Aaron”	Palaestina III		
26	Jubeiha	Jordan		Arabia		
27	Kastron Mefa’a	Jordan	Bishop Sergios	Arabia	587	Sergios
28	Kastron Mefa’a	Jordan	Church of the Lions	Arabia	574 or 589	Sergios
29	Kastron Mefa’a	Jordan	Church of the Palm Tree	Arabia		Sergios
30	Kastron Mefa’a	Jordan	Church of the Priest Wa’il	Arabia	586	Sergios
31	Kastron Mefa’a	Jordan	Church of the Reliquary	Arabia	586	Sergios



No.	Site	Modern State	Site Name	Byzantine Province	Date of Mosaic Scheme	Bishop
32	Kastron Mefa'a	Jordan	Church of the Rivers	Arabia	574 or 594	Sergios
33	Kastron Mefa'a	Jordan	Hagios Paulos	Arabia	578 or 593	Sergios (?)
34	Kastron Mefa'a	Jordan	Hagios Stephanos	Arabia	718 and 756	Sergios (II?), Job
35	Khasfin	Israel, Palestine		Palaestina II		
36	Khattabiya	Jordan		Arabia		
37	Khilda-Amman	Jordan	Hagios Varos	Palaestina II	687	George
38	Khirbet Asida	Israel, Palestine		Palaestina I		
39	Khirbet Beit Loya	Israel, Palestine		Palaestina I		
40	Khirbet al-Bediyeh	Jordan	Holy Martyr	Arabia	640	
41	Khirbet el-Burz	Israel, Palestine		Palaestina II		
42	Khirbet Dohaleh	Jordan		Palaestina II		
43	Khirbet al-Samra	Jordan	Hagios Anastasios	Arabia		
44	Khirbet al-Samra	Jordan	Hagios Georgios	Arabia	637	Theodoros
45	Khirbet al-Samra	Jordan	Hagios Ioannes	Arabia	639	Theodoros
46	Khirbet al-Samra	Jordan	Hagios Petros	Arabia		Theodoros
47	Khirbet al-Samra	Jordan	Hegumen Church	Arabia		
48	Khirbet et-Tira	Israel, Palestine		Palaestina I		
49	Kursi	Israel, Palestine	"Church of the Multiplication"	Palaestina II		
50	Kursi	Israel, Palestine	"Chapel of the Swine"	Palaestina II		
51	Ma'in	Jordan	Akropolis Church	Arabia	719/20	
52	Madaba	Jordan	Al-Khadir	Arabia		
53	Madaba	Jordan	"Cathedral Church"	Arabia		John, Sergios, Leontios
54	Madaba	Jordan	Elianos Crypt	Arabia	595/96	Sergios
55	Madaba	Jordan	Hagios Elias	Arabia	607/8	Leontios
56	Madaba	Jordan	"Map Church"	Arabia	ca. 540	
57	Madaba	Jordan	Martyr Theodore	Arabia	562	John
58	Madaba	Jordan	Sunna	Arabia		
59	Mahatt el-Urdi	Israel, Palestine		Palaestina I		
60	Mar Elyas	Jordan	"Hagios Elias"	Arabia	622? and 776	
61	Massuh	Jordan		Arabia		Theodosios
62	Massuh	Jordan	"North Church"	Arabia		
63	Mount Nebo "Memorial of Moses"	Jordan	"New Baptistery"	Arabia	597	Sergios
64	Mount Nebo "Memorial of Moses"	Jordan	"Theotokos Chapel"	Arabia	603–608	Leontios

Table 1 (*continued*)

No.	Site	Modern State	Site Name	Byzantine Province	Date of Mosaic Scheme	Bishop
65	Muqakwir	Jordan		Arabia	602/3	Malechios
66	Nabgha	Syria		Syria I	406/7	
67	Nitl	Jordan		Arabia		
68	Qam	Jordan		Arabia		
69	Ras ed-Deir	Jordan	Michael and Gabriel	Arabia	599/600	John
70	Rihab	Jordan	Hagia Sophia	Arabia	605	Polyeuktos
71	Rihab	Jordan	Hagios Ioannes	Arabia	623	Polyeuktos
72	Rihab	Jordan	Hagios Konstantinos	Arabia	623	Polyeuktos
73	Rihab	Jordan	Hagia Maria	Arabia	533/84	
74	Rihab	Jordan	Hagios Paulos	Arabia	595	Polyeuktos
75	Rihab	Jordan	Hagios Petros	Arabia	623	Polyeuktos
76	Rihab	Jordan	Hagios Sergios	Arabia	691	
77	Roglit	Israel		Palaestina I		
78	Sa'ad	Jordan		Arabia		
79	Sama al-Rusan	Jordan		Palaestina I		
80	Seilun	Israel, Palestine		Palaestina I		
81	Suhmata	Israel, Palestine		Phoenicia (?)	555	John and Kyriakos
82	Tel Kerioth	Israel, Palestine		Palaestina I		
83	Tel Umaryi	Jordan	Hagios Sergios	Arabia		Polyeuktos
84	Umm el-Manabi	Jordan		Palaestina II		
85	Ya'amun	Jordan	Bishop Leontios	Arabia		Leontios
86	Zay el-Gharbi	Jordan		Palaestina II		
87	Zizia	Jordan	Bishop John	Arabia	ca. 560s	John

Note: Site names are spelled in the form most common in the published literature.

(near Gaza) and Khirbet el-Burz near Qaysariyah (formerly Caesarea Maritima). Fifty-five (63 percent) of the known eighty-seven examples are located in the former province of Arabia, with notable concentrations of activity in Gerasa (modern Jarash) and in the Madaba plains. Examples from Palaestina Secunda, especially around Pella (modern Tabaqat Fahl) and Philadelphia (modern Amman), continue this geographical sweep through the Transjordan, with a further cluster near Jerusalem (Bayt al-Maqdis) providing the only parallel

concentration in the former province of Palaestina Prima (fig. 2).

Notably, the phenomenon appears overwhelmingly rural in character. Seventy (80 percent) of the eighty-seven currently known examples are located in villages or as part of solitary monastic buildings or *kastra*, with seventeen (20 percent) located within the walled boundaries of the region's urban centers. One possible explanation for this may lie in the regional distribution of particular floor designs, especially schemes

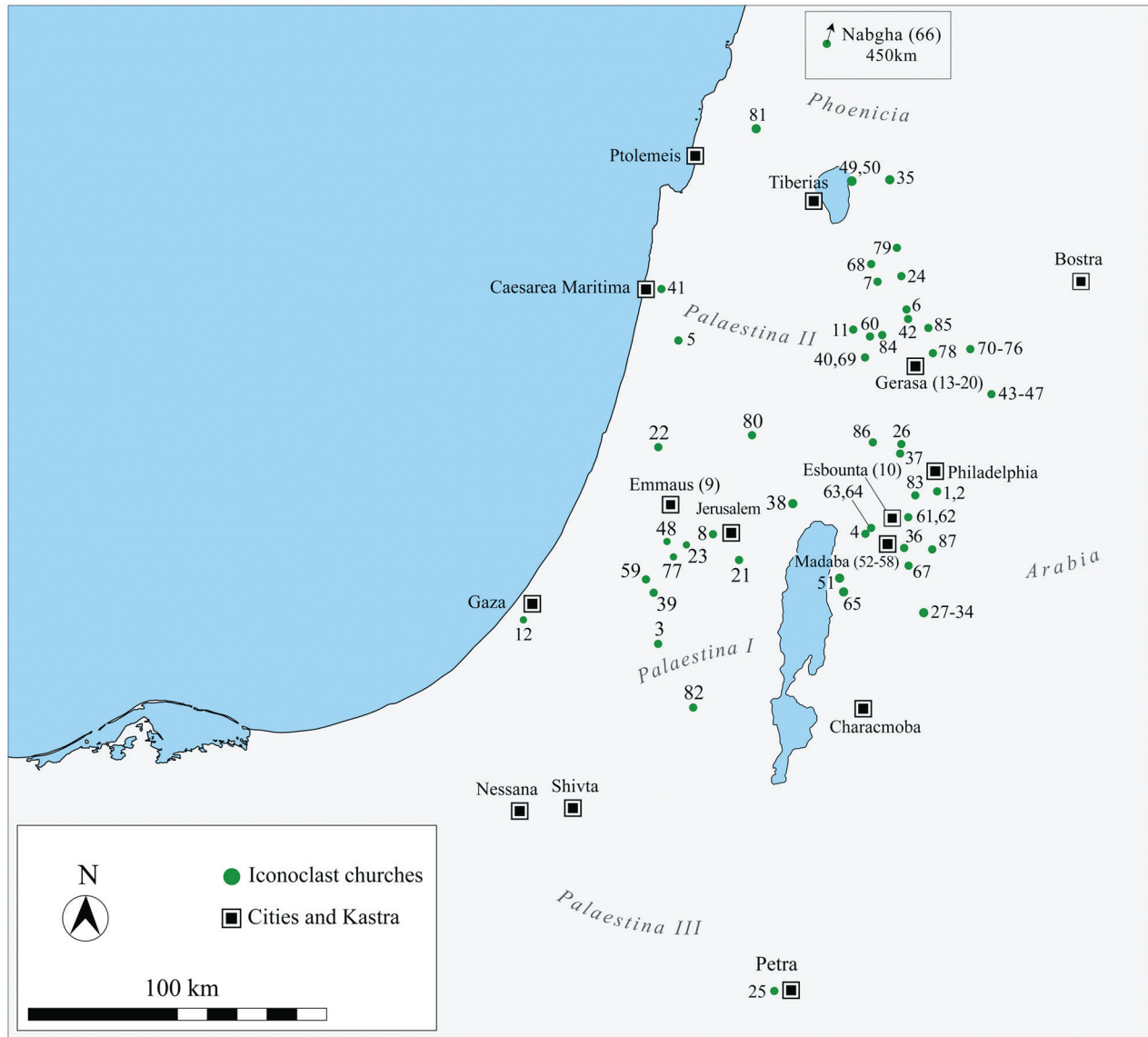


Fig. 2. Map of iconoclast churches in Arabia-Palaestina known in 2015. The numbered sites are listed in table 1.

that featured a diverse array of human and animal subjects that were often targeted for iconoclast censure. Despite the high profile of figural schemes in modern academic discourse, they represent a much smaller corpus than geometric designs, and one that is accented by strong patterns of regional nucleation. Accordingly, the overall impact of iconoclasm on church decoration at a pan-regional level is often susceptible to over emphasis unless observed in the context of the wider corpus of mosaic schemes and flooring levels known through

excavation. Of 206 well-published mosaic schemes from the region dated between the fifth and eighth centuries consulted for this study, only around 45 (22 percent) offer examples of inhabited vines scroll motifs (listed as IS in table 2) or nilotic scenes that feature the wealth of human and animal subjects commonly represented within the corpus of iconoclast churches (table 2; fig. 20). It is churches from this group, however, that appear most frequently to have excited iconoclast fervor.

Table 2 Churches and mosaic schemes consulted for this study.

Site names are spelled in the form most common in the published literature. Italics indicate churches with mosaic schemes subject to iconoclast intervention. A = anthropomorphic motifs; AL = allegorical themes or personifications; FM = foliate motifs; G= geometric designs; GM = geometric motifs; IS = inhabited scroll; OS = opus sectile; PL = plaster repairs; RT = replacement tesserae; S = stone; SR = stone repairs; ST = scrambled tesserae; UN = unknown mosaic design; Z = zoomorphic motifs

IC Site No.	Site	Name	Byzantine Region	Early Islamic Region	Date	Motifs	Iconoclasm	Type
	Ain el-Bad		Syria	Jund Hims	6th century	IS	No	
2	<i>Al-Quwaymah</i>	<i>Hagios Kyriakos</i>	<i>Palaestina II</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>		Z	Yes	
1	<i>Al-Quwaymah</i>	<i>Lower Church</i>	<i>Palaestina II</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>	717/18	AL, Z	Yes	RT
	Amathos		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		G	No	
3	<i>Anab al-Kebir</i>	<i>Hagios Thomas</i>	<i>Palaestina I</i>	<i>Jund Filastin</i>		A, Z	Yes	ST
	Apollonia		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		G, Z	No	
	Ascalon		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin	499	G	No	
	Asida		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		IS	No	
4	<i>Ayn al-Kanisah</i>	<i>"Theotokos Chapel"</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>	6th century and 762	IS	Yes	RT
	Ayn Musa	Kaianos	Arabia	Jund Dimashq		A, Z	No	
	Ayn Musa	Deacon Thomas	Arabia	Jund Dimashq		IS	No	
5	<i>Bahan</i>		<i>Palaestina I</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>		Z	Yes	ST
	Battir		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		G, Z	No	
	Baysan		Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		IS	No	
	Be'er Shem'a		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		IS	No	
	Bethlehem		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		G	No	
	Capernaum		Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		Z	No	
6	<i>Dariya</i>	<i>Hagioi Kosmas and Damianos</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>		A, Z	Yes	RT?
	Deir Ain Abata	Hagios Lot	Palaestina Tertia	Jund Dimashq	572/606/691	Z	No	
7	<i>Deir as-Sina</i>		<i>Palaestina II</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>		A, Z	Yes	UN
	Deir el-Asuf		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		IS	No	
	Ein Fattir		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		IS	No	
8	<i>Ein Hanniya</i>		<i>Palaestina I</i>	<i>Jund Filastin</i>		Z	Yes	UN
	El-Maqerqesh		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		IS	No	
	El-Maqerqesh		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		OS	No	
	Elusa		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		S	No	
9	<i>Emmaus</i>	<i>North Church</i>	<i>Palaestina I</i>	<i>Jund Filastin</i>		UN	Yes	UN
10	<i>Esbounta (Hesban)</i>	<i>North Church</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>		Z	Yes	PL
	Esbounta (Hesban)	South Church	Arabia	Jund Dimashq		Z	No	
11	<i>Farah el-Hashmiya</i>		<i>Palaestina II</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>		Z	Yes	UN



IC Site No.	Site	Name	Byzantine Region	Early Islamic Region	Date	Motifs	Iconoclasm	Type
	Frikya		Syria	Jund Dimashq		IS	No	
12	<i>Gaza-Jabaliyah</i>		<i>Palaestina I</i>	<i>Jund Filastin</i>	497–732	A, Z	Yes	ST
13	<i>Gerasa</i>	<i>Bishop Isaiah</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>	559	A, Z	Yes	RT, ST
	<i>Gerasa</i>	Bishop Genesios	Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn	611	G	No	
	<i>Gerasa</i>	Bishop Marianos	Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn	570	G	No	
14	<i>Gerasa</i>	“Cathedral”	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>		OS, AL	Yes	RT
	<i>Gerasa</i>	Elias, Maria, Soreg Chapel	Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn		IS	No	
15	<i>Gerasa</i>	<i>Hagios Georgios</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>	533	Z	Yes	LT
	<i>Gerasa</i>	Hagios Ioannes	Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn	531	A, Z	No	
	<i>Gerasa</i>	Hagioi Kosmas and Damianos	Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn	533	A, Z	No	
16	<i>Gerasa</i>	<i>Hagioi Petros and Paulos</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>		Z	Yes	PL
17	<i>Gerasa</i>	<i>Hagios Prokopios</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>	526	Z	Yes	PL, RT
	<i>Gerasa</i>	Hagios Theodoros	Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn		OS	No	
18	<i>Gerasa</i>	<i>Mortuary Church</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>		A, IS, Z	Yes	SR, ST
	<i>Gerasa</i>	Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs	Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn	464/65	G	No	
	<i>Gerasa</i>	Propylaea	Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn		G, S	No	
19	<i>Gerasa</i>	<i>Synagogue Church</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>	530/31	Z	Yes	RT
20	<i>Gerasa-Zagbrit</i>	<i>Hagia Sophia</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>	542/43	Z?	Yes	UN
	Hadid		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		A, Z	No	
	Haouarte		Syria	Jund Hims	484	IS	No	
	Haouarte		Syria	Jund Hims	486/87 or 501/2	IS	No	
	Haouarte		Syria	Jund Hims		IS	No	
	Haouarte		Syria	Jund Hims	568	IS	No	
	Hazor-Ashdod		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin	512	IS	No	
	Herodium	Hagios Mikael	Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		G	No	
	Herodium	Central Church	Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		G	No	
21	<i>Herodium</i>	East Church	<i>Palaestina I</i>	<i>Jund Filastin</i>		IS, Z	Yes	

Table 2 (*continued*)

IC Site No.	Site	Name	Byzantine Region	Early Islamic Region	Date	Motifs	Iconoclasm	Type
	Hippos	Northeast Church	Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		G, OS	No	
	Hippos	Northwest Church	Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		G, OS	No	
	Hippos	Southeast Church	Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		G, OS	No	
	Hippos	Southwest Church	Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		G, OS	No	
	Horvat Bata		Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		G		
	Horvat Be'er-shem'a		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		IS	No	
	Horvat Berachot		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		Z	No	
22	<i>Horvat Hani</i>		<i>Palaestina I</i>	<i>Jund Filastin</i>		Z	Yes	RT
23	<i>Horvat Hanot</i>		<i>Palaestina I</i>	<i>Jund Filastin</i>	563/64, 578/79, 593/94, or 608/9	Z	Yes	RT
	Horvat Hesheq		Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn	519/35	G	No	
	Horvat Midras		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		Z	No	
24	<i>Hufa</i>		<i>Palaestina II</i>	<i>Jund Filastin</i>		IS, Z	Yes	RT
	Jabal al-Akhar		Arabia	Jund Dimashq		Z	No	
25	<i>Jabal Harun</i>		<i>Palaestina III</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>		A, Z	Yes	LT
	Jabr	Bishop Agapios	Palaestina II?	Jund Dimashq	531	G	No	
	Jenah		Phoenicia	Jund Dimashq		IS	No	
	Jerusalem	Armenian Chapel	Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		IS	No	
	Jerusalem	Eleona	Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		OS	No	
	Jerusalem	Nea Church	Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		OS, S	No	
26	<i>Jubeiba</i>		<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>		A, Z	Yes	UN
27	<i>Kastron Mefa'a</i>	<i>Bishop Sergios</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>	586/87	IS	Yes	FM/ RT/ST
28	<i>Kastron Mefa'a</i>	<i>Church of the Lions</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>	574/89	A, Z	Yes	ST
29	<i>Kastron Mefa'a</i>	<i>Church of the Palm Tree</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>		A, Z	Yes	ST
30	<i>Kastron Mefa'a</i>	<i>Church of the Priest Wa'il</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>	586	A, Z	Yes	ST
31	<i>Kastron Mefa'a</i>	<i>Church of the Reliquary</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>		IS	Yes	RT
32	<i>Kastron Mefa'a</i>	<i>Church of the Rivers</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>	574/94	A, Z	Yes	ST
33	<i>Kastron Mefa'a</i>	<i>Hagios Paulos</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>	578/93	A, Z	Yes	ST

IC Site No.	Site	Name	Byzantine Region	Early Islamic Region	Date	Motifs	Iconoclasm	Type
34	<i>Kastron Mefa'a</i>	<i>Hagios Stephanos</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>	<i>718 and 756</i>	<i>IS</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>FM/RT/ST</i>
	Kastron Mefa'a	Tabula Ansata	Arabia	Jund Dimashq		S	No	
	Kastron Mefa'a	Tower Church	Arabia	Jund Dimashq		S	No	
	Kathisma	Theotokos	Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		S	No	
	Khan Khalde		Syria	Jund Dimashq	503/6	Z	No	
35	<i>Khasfin</i>		<i>Palaestina II</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>		<i>Z</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>UN</i>
	Khasfin		Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn	604 or 618?	G, FM	No	
	Khattabiya	Mosque Church	Arabia	Jund Dimashq		Z	No	
36	<i>Khatabiya</i>	<i>John and Elias</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>		<i>IS</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>FM</i>
37	<i>Khilda-Amman</i>	<i>Hagios Varos</i>	<i>Palaestina II</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>	<i>687</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>UN</i>
	Khirbet Abu Rish		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		G	No	
40	<i>Khirbet al-Bediyeh</i>	<i>Holy Martyr</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>		<i>A, Z</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>UN</i>
	Khirbet al-Kursi		Arabia	Jund Dimashq		IS	No	
43	<i>Khirbet al-Samra</i>	<i>Anastasios</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>		<i>Z</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>ST</i>
44	<i>Khirbet al-Samra</i>	<i>Hagios Georgios</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>	<i>637</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>ST</i>
45	<i>Khirbet al-Samra</i>	<i>Hagios Ioannes</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>	<i>639</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>UN</i>
46	<i>Khirbet al-Samra</i>	<i>Hagios Petros</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>		<i>A</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>ST?</i>
47	<i>Khirbet al-Samra</i>	<i>Hegumen Church</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>		<i>A</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>ST</i>
	Khirbet al-Wahadnah		Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		G	No	
38	<i>Khirbet Asida</i>		<i>Palaestina I</i>	<i>Jund Filastin</i>		<i>IS</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>ST</i>
	Khirbet Barqa Gan-Yavneh		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin	511	IS	No	
39	<i>Khirbet Beit Loya</i>		<i>Palaestina I</i>	<i>Jund Filastin</i>		<i>IS</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
	Khirbet Beit Sila		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		G	No	
42	<i>Khirbet Dohaleh</i>		<i>Palaestina I</i>	<i>Jund Filastin</i>		<i>UN</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>ST</i>
	Khirbet ed-Deir		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		G	No	
	Khirbet el-Beiyudat		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		G	No	
41	<i>Khirbet el-Burz</i>		<i>Palaestina II</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>		<i>UN</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>UN</i>
	Khirbet el-Kerak		Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn	528/29	G, FM	No	
	Khirbet el-Mukhayyat	Hagioi Lot and Prokopios	Arabia	Jund Dimashq	557	IS	No	
	Khirbet el-Mukhayyat	Hagios Georgios	Arabia	Jund Dimashq	535/36	IS	No	
	Khirbet el-Mukhayyat	Priest John	Arabia	Jund Dimashq		IS	No	

Table 2 (*continued*)

IC Site No.	Site	Name	Byzantine Region	Early Islamic Region	Date	Motifs	Iconoclasm	Type
	Khirbet es-Shubeika		Palaestina I	Jund al-Urdunn	785 or 801/2	G	No	
48	<i>Khirbet et-Tira</i>		<i>Palaestina II</i>	Jund Filastin		UN	Yes	UN
	Khirbet Istabul		Palaestina Prima	Jund Filastin	701	G	No	
	Khirbet Munyah		Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn		G, Z	No	
	Khirbet Sokho		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		IS	No	
	Khirbet Yattir		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin	631	G	No	
	Kissufim	Hagios Elias	Palaestina I	Jund Filastin	578	A, Z	No	
49	<i>Kursi</i>	<i>"Multiplication Church"</i>	<i>Palaestina II</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>		F	Yes	PL?
50	<i>Kursi</i>	<i>Chapel of the Swine</i>	<i>Palaestina II</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>		Z?	Yes	PL?
	Ma'ale Adummim		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		IS	No	
51	<i>Ma'in</i>	<i>Akropolis Church</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>	719/20	AL	Yes	RT
	Mamphis	East Church	Palaestina III	Jund Filastin		G	No	
	Mamphis	West Church	Palaestina III	Jund Filastin		G, FM, Z	No	
	Ma'on-Nirim		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		IS	No	
	Maqati		Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn	482/83	G	No	
52	<i>Madaba</i>	<i>Al-Khadir</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>		IS	Yes	PL? RT?
53	<i>Madaba</i>	<i>"Cathedral Church"</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>		OS, S	Yes	PL? RT?
	Madaba	Hagioi Apostoloi	Arabia	Jund Dimashq	578	A, Z	No	
54	<i>Madaba</i>	<i>Hagios Elianos Crypt (?)</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>	595/96	Z	Yes	UN
55	<i>Madaba</i>	<i>Hagios Elias</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>	607/8	A, Z	Yes	RT
56	<i>Madaba</i>	<i>"Map Church"</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>		A, Z	Yes	ST
57	<i>Madaba</i>	<i>Martyr Theodore</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>	562	A, Z	Yes	PL? RT?
58	<i>Madaba</i>	<i>Sunna Family</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>		IS	Yes	
	Madaba	Theotokos	Arabia	Jund Dimashq	767	G	No	
	Madaba	Twal Family	Arabia	Jund Dimashq		IS	No	
	Magen		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		G	No	
59	<i>Mahatt el-Urdi</i>		<i>Palaestina I</i>	<i>Jund Filastin</i>		A, AL, Z	Yes	
60	<i>Mar Elyas</i>		<i>Palaestina II</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>	622 and 776	Z	Yes	LT, RT
	Maresha		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		G	No	
61	<i>Massub</i>		<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>		A, Z	Yes	RT
62	<i>Massub</i>	<i>North Church</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>		A, Z	Yes	UN



IC Site No.	Site	Name	Byzantine Region	Early Islamic Region	Date	Motifs	Iconoclasm	Type
	Mount Gerazim		Palaestina	Jund Filastin		S	No	
	Mount Nebo	Old Diakonikon	Arabia	Jund Dimashq	530	Z	No	
63	<i>Mount Nebo</i> <i>"Memorial of Moses"</i>	<i>"New Baptistery"</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>	<i>597</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>ST</i>
64	<i>Mount Nebo</i> <i>"Memorial of Moses"</i>	<i>"Theotokos Chapel"</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>	<i>603–8</i>	<i>AL, Z</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>ST</i>
65	<i>Muqawir</i>	<i>Bishop Malechios</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>		<i>IS</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>ST</i>
66	<i>Nabgha</i>		<i>Syria I</i>	<i>Al-Awasim</i>	<i>402/3</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>ST</i>
	Nahariya		Palaestina I	Jund al-Urdunn		A, Z	No	
	Nessana	Hagia Maria	Palaestina III	Jund Filastin		OS, S	No	
	Nessana	Hagioi Sergios and Bakkhos	Palaestina III	Jund Filastin		OS, S	No	
	Nessana	Central Church	Palaestina III	Jund Filastin		OS, S	No	
67	<i>Nitl</i>		<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund Dimashq</i>		<i>Z</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>ST</i>
	Nu'aymah		Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		Z	No	
	Ostrakine		Palaestina III	Jund Filastin		S	No	
	Pella	West Church	Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		OS, S	No	
	Pella	East Church	Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		OS, S	No	
	Pella	Civic Complex Church	Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		OS, S	No	
	Petra	Petra Church	Palaestina III	Jund Dimashq		A, OS, Z	No	
	Qabr Himran	Hagios Christophoros	Phoenicia	Jund Dimashq		Z	No	
68	<i>Qam</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Palaestina II</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>		<i>Z</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>ST</i>
	Qum Hartaine		Syria	Jund Dimashq		IS	No	
69	<i>Ras ed-Deir</i>	<i>Michael and Gabriel</i>	<i>Palaestina II</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>	<i>599/600</i>	<i>A, Z</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>RT, ST</i>
	Rehovot-in-the-Negev	North Church	Palaestina III	Jund Filastin		S	No	
70	<i>Rihab</i>	<i>Hagia Sophia</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>	<i>605</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>UN</i>
	Rihab	Hagios Basilios	Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn	594	G	No	
	Rihab	Hagios Georgios	Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn	531	G	No	
71	<i>Rihab</i>	<i>Hagios Ioannes</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>	<i>623</i>	<i>A, Z</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>RT, ST</i>
72	<i>Rihab</i>	<i>Hagios Konstantinos</i>	<i>Arabia</i>	<i>Jund al-Urdunn</i>	<i>623</i>	<i>A, Z</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>RT?</i>

Table 2 (*continued*)

IC Site No.	Site	Name	Byzantine Region	Early Islamic Region	Date	Motifs	Iconoclasm	Type
73	Rihab	Hagia Maria	Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn	533/83	A, Z	Yes	RT
	Rihab	Hagios Menas	Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn	635	G	No	
74	Rihab	Hagios Paulos	Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn	595	A, Z	Yes	PL? RT
75	Rihab	Hagios Petros	Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn	623	A, Z	Yes	RT
76	Rihab	Hagios Sergios	Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn	691	A, Z	Yes	FM, RT
77	Roglit		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		Z	Yes	UN
78	Sa'ad		Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn	583/84	Z	Yes	UN
79	Sama al-Rusan		Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		A, Z	Yes	RT, ST
80	Seilun		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin		Z	Yes	RT
	Sha'ar ha-Aliyah		Palaestina I	Jund al-Urdunn		G	No	
	Shellal		Palaestina I	Jund Filastin	561/62	IS	No	
	Shivta	North Church	Palaestina III	Jund Filastin		S	No	
	Shivta	South Church	Palaestina III	Jund Filastin		S	No	
	Shuna		Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		G, Z	No	
	Sinai	Theotokos	Palaestina III	Misr		OS	No	
81	Submata		Phoenicia?	Jund al-Urdunn		A, Z	Yes	UN
	Suwafiyah		Arabia	Jund Dimashq		IS	No	
	Tamra		Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn	725	G	No	
82	Tel Kerioth		Palaestina I	Jund Dimashq		Z	Yes	LT
83	Tel Umaryi		Arabia	Jund Dimashq		Z	Yes	ST
	Tiberias	Mount Berenike	Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		S	No	
84	Umm el-Manabi		Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		A, Z	Yes	UN
	Umm Qays	"Cathedral Church"	Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		OS	No	
	Umm Qays	Octagonal Church	Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn		OS	No	
	Wadi Afrit		Arabia	Jund Dimashq		G	No	
	Wadi al-Dayr		Arabia	Jund Dimashq	557/58	G	No	
	Wadi Rajib		Palaestina II	Jund al-Urdunn?		G	No	
85	Ya'amun	Bishop Leontios	Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn		A	Yes	UN
	Yasilah		Arabia	Jund al-Urdunn	518	Z	No	
	Zaharani		Phoenicia	Jund Dimashq	524	IS	No	
	Zaharani		Phoenicia	Jund Dimashq	535	IS	No	
86	Zay el-Ghabi		Palaestina I	Jund al-Urdunn		A, Z	Yes	ST
87	Zizia	Bishop John	Arabia	Jund Dimashq		A, Z	Yes	ST

Seventeen examples (36 percent) of such schemes are located in the Transjordan, and indicate that the high degree of nucleation of iconoclast activity around Madaba and the Dekapolis must be observed in relation to regional patterns of mosaic decoration established before the mid-eighth century. In regions west of the Transjordan (with the exception of Jerusalem), including the Negev, the Galilee, and the Mediterranean coast, animated schemes in churches are rarer and seldom appear as part of a cluster of churches featuring similar designs in single settlements, as seen in the settlements of Kastron Mefa'a (eleven churches), Rihab (twelve churches), and Khirbet al-Samra (eight churches), which have no parallels in the region now encompassed by modern Israel, Palestine, and the occupied territories.<sup>42</sup> In this respect, the heavy

concentration of multiple church buildings within single villages in the Transjordan distorts our ability to contextualize the distribution of iconoclastic sentiment and offers an impression of the Transjordan as a region characterized by a pervasive concern about images, rather than one where such sentiments and associated activities are simply most readily identified. Thus the general preference for multiple church buildings in single settlements, which characterized rural patronage in the Transjordan following the sixth century, has distorted our understanding of the regional distribution of Palestinian iconoclasm.

Two further questions relating to the dating of the schemes subject to iconoclasm and their distribution have equal bearing upon this debate. The first is chronological. Although mosaics exhibiting figural themes are known in church contexts in the region from the fifth century, schemes commissioned in the sixth—notably following 550—are characterized by a profusion of complex mosaic designs featuring highly animate agrarian and nilotic subjects. Accordingly, of the eighty-seven known cases of iconoclast intervention, forty (47 percent) relate to schemes whose dates can be securely placed in the sixth century (or later) via their dedicatory inscriptions, with thirty-four (85 percent) of these schemes dated to after 550.<sup>43</sup>

In terms of distribution, then, the intensity of iconoclast intervention within the Transjordan may partially reflect a development framed by the related processes of settlement expansion before 750. The late sixth century saw an explosion of rural settlement in the provinces of Arabia and Palaestina Secunda, notably in the Madaba plains and the hinterlands of the southern Dekapolis, signaling a development that can be traced into the mid-eighth century with the foundation of the churches of Ma'in (719/20), of Hagios Stephanos in Kastron Mefa'a (founded 718 and refurbished in 756),

42 For Kastron Mefa'a these are: Hagios Stephanos, the Church of the Bishop Sergios, the Aedicula Church, the Niche Church, the Church of the Lions, the Church of the Palm Tree, the Church of the Rivers, the Church of the Priest Wa'il, the Church of the Tabula Ansata, the Church of Hagios Paulos, and the Chapel of the Peacocks. Four of these churches (Hagios Stephanos, Bishop Sergios, the Church of the Aedicula, and the Niche Church) form part of a single integrated ecclesiastical complex. The final report for these churches appears in M. Piccirillo, "Gli scavi del complesso di Santo Stefano," in *Umm al-Rasas Mayfa'ah I: Gli scavi del complesso di Santo Stefano*, ed. M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata (Jerusalem, 1994), 69–119. The report for the Church of the Lions appears in eadem, "La Chiesa dei Leoni," *Lib.ann* 42 (1992): 199–225. The Church of the Palm Tree and the Church of the Rivers are described in J. Bujard, M. Piccirillo, and M. Poiatti-Haldimann, "Les églises gémînées d'Umm er-Rasas: Fouilles de la mission archéologique suisse (Fondation Max van Berchem)," *AAJord* 36 (1992): 291–306. On the Church of the Priest Wa'il see M. Piccirillo, "La Chiesa del Prete Wa'il a Umm al-Rasas—Kastron Mefaa in Giordania," in *Early Christianity in Context: Monuments and Documents*, ed. F. Manns and E. Alliata (Jerusalem, 1993), 313–34. For the Church of Hagios Paulos see M. Piccirillo, "La Chiesa di San Paolo a Umm al-Rasas—Kastron Mefaa," *Lib.ann* 47 (1997): 375–94, and for the Tabula Ansata idem, "La Chiesa della Tabula Ansata a Umm al-Rasas—Kastron Mefaa," *Lib.ann* 53 (2003): 285–324. For Rihab, the nine published churches are Hagios Basilios, Hagios Georgios, Hagios Konstantinos, Hagia Maria, Hagios Menas, Hagios Petros, Hagios Paulos, Hagios Sergios, and Hagia Sophia. On the church of Hagios Georgios see A. Al-Hissan, "The New Archaeological Discoveries of the al-Fudayn and Rahab-al-Mafraq Excavation Projects, 1991–2001," *AAJord* 46 (2002): 71–94 (Arabic section). The inscriptions of the churches of Hagios Basilios, Hagia Maria, Hagios Menas, Hagios Petros, Hagios Paulos, and Hagia Sophia are reproduced in M. Piccirillo, *Chiese e mosaici della Giordania settentrionale* (Jerusalem, 1981), 63–90. Earlier treatment in M. Avi Yonah, "Christian Inscriptions from Rihab," 68–72. The churches of Hagios Konstantinos and Hagios Sergios are briefly discussed in Al-Hissan,

"New Archaeological Discoveries," 82. Buildings that do not feature mosaic pavements have been omitted from Tables 1 and 2.

43 Many of the iconoclasted schemes not accompanied by dated inscriptions are dated by the excavators to the sixth century. For examples of this see Jabal Harun (Hamarnah and Hinkkanen, "Mosaic," 259) and the mosaic of the Church of the Bishop Leontios, Ya'amun (N. Turshan, "The Magi: A Rare Mosaic Floor in the Ya'amun Church [Jordan]," *GRBS* 50 [2010]: 618). I have avoided listing them all as to do so would require an individual discussion of the diagnostic assemblages for each site from which a sixth-century date was proposed.

and Tamra (725).<sup>44</sup> The construction rate of church buildings corresponds to these general patterns. Simply, the majority of churches postdating 550, where highly animate schemes are more common, are located in the Transjordan and the environs of Jerusalem and correspond to areas that demonstrate explicit evidence for post-Justinianic expansion.<sup>45</sup> Thus the regions where we encounter the highest concentration of iconoclasted mosaics correspond to areas where concentrations of churches featuring animate designs are more often found. Of the total corpus of iconoclast churches, sixty-three (77 percent) are located in modern Jordan, now covering the Madaba-Karak plateau and the southern Dekapolis cities, and the majority in this region relate to mosaic schemes commissioned in the mid-sixth century or later (table 1). The comparative gaps in iconoclast activity that appear in the Golan Heights, Samaria, and the Negev may, as a result, be partially explained by the limited number of mosaic floors potentially antagonistic to iconoclast sentiments that have been recovered from these regions.

### *Intention and Impact*

The collective characteristics of the “Palestinian” iconoclastic corpus indicate that offending images were sensitively extracted and replaced with tesserae (whether new or rearranged) or lime mortar with the aim of preserving the aesthetic and physical integrity of the broader design.<sup>46</sup> In most cases care was clearly taken not to disrupt the dedicatory inscriptions or surrounding medallion borders which often framed the offending motifs. Many of the surviving examples demonstrate that the “iconoclasts” adhered closely to the original outlines of the images and avoided, where

possible, substantial damage to the intercessory pleas for divine agency that often accompanied them (fig. 3).

The extraction of images from the mosaic bed was generally partial rather than total. While general targets, such as the eyes, faces, and limbs, echo earlier episodes of iconoclastic attack on images of pre-Christian deities, the outlines of identifying features, such as a subject’s head or limbs, were often left unaltered in a manner that rendered the original figural motif still recognizable.<sup>47</sup> Like earlier *damnatio memoriae*, the mutilation of particular images in church floors was intended to remain perpetually visible to the church community.<sup>48</sup>

Notwithstanding the broad geographical span of iconoclast activity, the methods used to remove and repair offending motifs appear generally uniform and can be broadly grouped into three main approaches. Interventions that involved the rearrangement of existing tesserae are preserved most typically in the dual church complex of Hagios Stephanos and “Bishop Sergios” in Kastron Mefa’a, where tesserae extracted from animal or human subjects were scrambled and reset (fig. 4), or reused to fashion geometric (fig. 5) or foliate motifs (fig. 6).<sup>49</sup> The use of limestone tesserae to fill the cavities left by the removal of images presents another common technique for repairing images extracted from mosaic medallions and roundels. This method is known from examples such as Hagios Georgios in Gerasa (fig. 7) and Mar Elyas in the hinterlands of modern Aljoun (fig. 8). Plaster, stone, and mortar repairs, though substantially more ephemeral

44 The general expansion of rural settlement in this region has been surveyed in A. Walmsley, “Economic Developments and the Nature of Settlement in the Towns and Countryside of Syria-Palestine, ca. 565–800,” *DOP* 61 (2007): 319–52. See also R. De Vaux, “Chronique: Une mosaïque Byzantine à Main (Transjordanie),” *RevBibl* 47 (1938): 227–58; Piccirillo, “Le iscrizione di Kastron Mefaa,” in Piccirillo and Alliata, *Umm al-Rasas Mayfa’ah I*, 244–46; and L. Di Segni and Y. Tepper, “A Greek Inscription Dated by the Era of Hegira in an Umayyad Church at Tamra in Eastern Galilee,” *Lib.ann* 54 (2004): 343–50.

45 On the increasing use of nilotic and agrarian scenes in the sixth century see R. Hachlili, *Ancient Mosaic Pavements: Themes, Issues, and Trends* (Leiden, 2008) 107, 111–47. The earliest nilotic scenes in the Transjordan noted by Hachlili date to the sixth century.

46 Schick, *Christian Communities*, 189–95.

47 On attacks directed against earlier pre-Christian imagery see E. W. Sauer, “Disabling Demonic Images: Regional Diversity in Ancient Iconoclasts’ Motives and Targets,” in *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. K. Kolrud and M. Prusac (Aldershot, 2014), 16–21.

48 For an earlier comparison between Palestinian iconoclasm and *damnatio memoriae* see Brubaker, “Representation,” 55 and eadem, “Making and Breaking Images” (n. 5 above), 21–22. A different interpretation appears in F. B. Flood, “Christian Mosaics in Early Islamic Jordan and Palestine: A Case of Regional Iconoclasm,” in *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*, ed. H. Evans and B. Ratliff (New York, 2012), 117–19.

49 The dual church complex of Hagios Stephanos and Bishop Sergios is the most systematically described of the iconoclast interventions. For the description of the mosaics in the final excavation report see M. Piccirillo, “I mosaici del complesso di Santo Stefano,” in Piccirillo and Alliata, *Umm al-Rasas Mayfa’ah I*, 121–64. Thorough treatment of the iconoclastic interventions in Hagios Stephanos appears in Ognibene, *La Chiesa di Santo Stefano*, 160–459.





Fig. 3. Kastamonu Mef'a, Bishop Sergios, Jordan. Partial interventions to a nilotic motif in which the subjects and original theme remain discernible.

in the archaeological record, have been identified at the Hagios Prokopios church of Gerasa and the Church of Al-Khadir in Madaba and offer corresponding examples of extraction and repair.<sup>50</sup>

The interventions of the iconoclasts predominantly focused on removing mundane animal or human subjects (including donors' portraits and hunting scenes), and generally those within highly animated programs featuring nilotic and agrarian scenes, or personifications of natural phenomena.<sup>51</sup> Images of biblical figures

or themes were also removed, for example in panels featuring Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah and the sacrifice of Isaac, which were picked out and seemingly repaired with plaster, in the Church of Bishop Leontios in modern Ya'amun, Jordan (fig. 9).<sup>52</sup> An image of Jonah

50 Crowfoot, "Christian Churches" (n. 15 above), 262, and F. M. Biebel, "The Mosaics," in *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis*, ed. C. Kraeling (New Haven, CT, 1938), 340.

51 The best-explored cases of censoring donor portraits, pastoral scenes, and nilotic themes remain the churches of Kastamonu Mef'a. (For the larger churches of Hagios Stephanos and Bishop Sergios see n. 42 above.) A good summary of mosaic themes in the Transjordan appears in M. Piccirillo, "The Mosaics of Jordan," in *Interactions: Artistic Exchange between the Eastern and Western Worlds in the Medieval Period*, ed. C. Hourihane (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 28–47.

Individual reports for the churches and their mosaics appear in the following: Church of the Lions, Piccirillo, "La Chiesa dei Leoni"; Church of the Priest Wa'il, Piccirillo, "La Chiesa del Prete Wa'il," 313–34; and the Church of Hagios Paulos, Piccirillo, "La Chiesa di San Paolo," 375–94. Examples of the removal of personifications include the removal of the four rivers of paradise from the Chapel of the Martyr Theodore attached to the "Cathedral Church" of Madaba, and the removal of images of the months from the chapel attached to the "Cathedral Church" of Gerasa. The mosaics of the Chapel of the Martyr Theodore are reproduced in M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan* (Amman, 1993), 117. Those of the "Cathedral Church" of Gerasa are discussed in Biebel, "Mosaics," 312–13 and pl. 59.

52 For discussion of the schemes of Ya'amun see Turshan, "The Magi," 616–24; N. Turshan and M. Nassar, "A Mosaic of the Book of Daniel in the Ya'amun Church," *GRBS* 51 (2011): 340–49; and Nassar and Turshan "Geometrical Mosaic Pavements," 41–62.



Fig. 4.  
Kastron Mefa'a, Hagios  
Stephanos, Jordan.  
Rearranged tesserae in  
the vine scroll  
medallions in the  
central nave carpet.



Fig. 5.  
Kastron Mefa'a, Hagios  
Stephanos, Jordan.  
Donor portraits in the  
north aisle. Tesserae  
used in the depiction of  
the donor to the far  
right have been  
rearranged to form  
circles with concentric  
colored bands.







Fig. 6.  
Kastron Mefa'a,  
Hagios Stephanos,  
Jordan. A  
rearrangement of  
tesserae to create a  
vine leaf motif  
similar to those  
used to form the  
vine scroll roundels.



Fig. 7. (left)  
Gerasa, Hagios Georgios, Jordan. Limestone tesserae  
used to fill the cavities left by the removal of images.

Fig. 8. (above)  
Mar Elyas, Jordan. Limestone tesserae used to replace  
an image in the center of an octagonal roundel.  
(Photo: D. Osseman)





Fig. 9. Church of Bishop Leontios, Ya'amun, Jordan. Mosaic of Hananiah, Mishael, Daniel, and Azariah. (Photo: N. Turshan)

and the whale, subsequently removed by iconoclasts, has also been identified at a church in Mahatt el-Urdi.<sup>53</sup>

Episodes of image erasure from the liturgical furnishing of iconoclast churches support the argument that Palestinian iconoclasm was principally concerned with mundane rather than sacred representation. Alongside the interventions on the floors of the Church of the Priest Wa'il in Kastron Mefa'a, an image was carefully chiselled out of the church's south-facing altar panel.<sup>54</sup> This extension of iconoclasm to liturgical furnishing is paralleled in the considered removal of carvings of birds from the balustrade of the ambos in the Church of the Lions in Kastron Mefa'a (another "iconoclast" church), where images of crosses were preserved in their original form

(fig. 10). The Church of Hagios Prokopios in Gerasa, where images of sheep were erased from the (now lost) chancel panel, leaving the central cross intact, offers a similar, though poorly published, case study.<sup>55</sup> Possible examples from Diospolis and Hippos, and in a more ambiguous stratigraphic context at Pella, are also known.<sup>56</sup> At Hippos, a relief image of a dolphin was chiseled out of the chancel screen of the Southwest Church and may have been replaced by an alternative motif of a hanging lamp engraved onto

53 D. C. Baramki, "A Byzantine Church at Mahatt el-Urdi, Beit Jibrin, 1941–1942," *Lib. ann* 22 (1972): 134–35.

54 Piccirillo, "La Chiesa del Prete Wa'il," 321 and fig. 11.

55 Piccirillo, "La Chiesa dei Leoni," 207–8 and photos 16–19. The chancel screen from the Hagios Prokopios church has never been fully published, but it is mentioned in Crowfoot, "Christian Churches," 262.

56 L. Di Segni and Y. Zerlinger, "A Fourth-Century Church near Diospolis," *Lib. ann* 52 (2006): 462 and C. Epstein and V. Tzaferis, "The Baptistry at Sussita–Hippos," *Atiqot (English Series)* 20 (1991): 89–94. The images removed from Sussita were dolphins; those of the Civic Complex Church of Pella, sheep bowing to a central cross.





Figure 10.  
Kastron Mefa'a,  
Church of the Lions,  
Jordan, balustrade with  
iconoclastic intervention.  
(Drawing: Studium  
Biblicum Franciscanum)

the screen's reverse side.<sup>57</sup> The approach is mirrored at the Civic Complex Church, Pella, where two bowing sheep were similarly expunged, while avoiding damage to the central cross.<sup>58</sup>

The sensitivity of these interventions, clearly aimed at maintaining the functional integrity of liturgical screens and balustrades, compares well with the careful removal of images from mosaics previously noted by Robert Schick.<sup>59</sup> Additional evidence, beyond liturgical furnishing itself, also indicates that the preservation of crosses and nonfigural motifs with explicit Christian associations was deliberate rather than circumstantial. At a number of iconoclast churches, including the basilicas of Mount Nebo, and Mahatt el-Urdi, crosses on column capitals and other architectural features were left untouched despite interventions on images on the mosaic floor.<sup>60</sup> The corpora of

liturgical furnishing and sculpture from the Hagios Stephanos and "Bishop Sergios" churches of Kastron Mefa'a, both with disfigured mosaic floors, similarly exhibit no intervention directed at the image of the cross, despite the contentious nature of the symbol to early Muslim communities.<sup>61</sup>

Beyond churches, parallel cases of mosaic iconoclasm have also been noted in a number of synagogues, concentrated primarily around the Galilee, where images of animals or the signs of the zodiac were neutralized by rearranging tesserae or filling cavities with

57 M. Avi-Yonah, "Places of Worship in the Roman and Byzantine Periods," in *The Holy Land: New Light on the Pre-History and Early History of Israel*, ed. W. A. Ruysch, Antiquity and Survival 2:2–3 (The Hague, 1957), 262 and pl. 6–7.

58 An image of this screen is reproduced in Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 330, pl. 697.

59 *Christian Communities*, 189–95.

60 A. Acconci, "Elements of the Liturgical Furniture," in *Mount Nebo: New Archaeological Excavations 1967–1997*, ed. M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata (Jerusalem, 1998), 509–21 and Baramaki, "A Byzantine Church," fig. 12–13.

61 A. Acconci, "L'Arredo liturgico," in Piccirillo and E. Alliata, *Umm al-Rasas Mayfā'ah I*, 290–313. Islamic criticisms of the cross were clearly known to Melkite communities by the mid-eighth century. A defence of the cross appears in the Arabic apology preserved in Sinai Arabic 154 (dated 755/88), today known by the modern title "On the Triune Nature of God." A partial edition and translation is available in M. D. Gibson, *An Arabic version of the Acts of the Apostles and the seven Catholic Epistles from an eighth or ninth Century MS. in the Convent of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai; with a Treatise on the triune nature of God, with translation, from the same Codex* (London, 1899). Important studies of this work include, M. Swanson, "Beyond Proof-texting: Approaches to the Qur'an in Some Early Arabic Christian Apologies," *The Muslim World* 88 (1998): 297–319 and M. Swanson, "Apologetics, Catechesis, and the Question of Audience in 'On the Triune Nature of God' (Sinai Arabic 154) and three treatises of Theodore Abū Qurrah," in M. Tamcke (ed.), *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages* (Beirut, 2007), 113–134.

lime mortar.<sup>62</sup> This development is less well explored than the corresponding trend from churches, although on occasion both have been considered responses to identical social stimuli.<sup>63</sup> The reasoning for this modern connection remains unclear, but seems partly indebted to the fact that both the general targeting by “iconoclastic” groups of animal and human images, and the careful manner in which the alterations were made, allude to a mutual and contemporaneous concern among Christian and Jewish communities in the region about the suitability of such images in the embellishment of sacred space.<sup>64</sup> This interpretation is plausible, but needs to be advanced delicately. Comparisons based on direct aesthetic parallels between the residues of image destruction can obscure the complex and highly distinctive intellectual backdrops that fostered them, which inevitably become less apparent when objects subjected to modification are isolated from their distinct historical and physical contexts and are crudely paired for public and scholarly consumption. Mosaic is one medium that has proved

particularly susceptible to such isolationist approaches because this material is habitually published separately from other archaeological data. Hence no study of Palestinian iconoclasm can comfortably proceed without more open recognition of the methodologies that underlie our methods of retrieval and presentation of mosaic in contemporary scholarship. This brings us to the first of the antiquarian legacies.

### Palestinian Iconoclasm Through the Antiquarian Eye

The scholarly tendency to partition the study of mosaic into a category distinct from other architectural media is both habitual and endemic to studies of Byzantine Arabia and Palaestina. Indeed, the practice enjoys a formidable pedigree, stretching back to the beginnings of archaeological research in the region. To the present day, excavation strategies as well as publication trends and museum collections routinely endorse the detachment of mosaics from their immediate architectural and archaeological settings. This isolation is not only theoretical but physical: several of the iconoclastic mosaic schemes from Arabia and Palaestina were removed at the point of excavation and exist now as mounted objects in museum and university galleries. Those of the Church of Hagios Prokopios of Gerasa and the Akropolis Church of Ma’in offer two cases in point (fig. 11).<sup>65</sup>

Photography and illustration routinely reveal the second of these conceptual fractures. Few of the publications treating mosaic iconoclasm are contextual in their approach, opting instead to concentrate on images of solitary motifs reproduced in a manner reminiscent of fine art reproductions.<sup>66</sup> The enduring popularity of the singular mosaic motif in academic publications has, consequently, secured the insularity of the iconoclast floor as an entity whose biography can seemingly be understood and examined in isolation from its permanent physical setting. As a result, it is the aesthetic properties of the mosaic “image” (such as its subject or

62 On this development see S. Fine, “Iconoclasm and the Art of Late-Antique Palestinian Synagogues,” in *From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. Levine and Z. Weiss (Portsmouth, RI, 2000), 183–94. There are currently four known cases of intervention in synagogues: Na’aran, Ein Hanniya, Meroth, and Horbat Susiya. If it is to be accepted, Fine’s dating of these interventions to the seventh century would discredit a direct association with examples from churches that have been dated by Susanna Ognibene to the period 720–760. This is suggested by the interventions to the original mosaic schemes in the Akropolis Church of Ma’in and the Church of Hagios Stephanos, Kastron Mefa’a, which were laid in 717/18 and 719. The early report of the Akropolis Church appears in Vaux, “Chronique,” 227–58. I would reject Eliya Ribak’s inclusion in this corpus of the Dura Europos synagogue, which predates the other examples by two or three centuries and is sufficiently isolated geographically to suggest that the iconoclastic interventions on the wall paintings (mostly of biblical scenes rather than the secular themes known from Palaestina) were motivated by distinct events; see Ribak, “Archaeological Evidence,” 11. In the synagogue schemes, the insecure dating for the identified iconoclastic activity should caution against explicit comparisons with the corpus known from churches based solely on aesthetic resemblance.

63 Most recently in Ribak, “Archaeological Evidence,” 1–3.

64 The dating of this phenomenon is difficult to determine. Fine considers it a response to Islam: “Iconoclasm,” 194. Schick, *Christian Communities*, 202–3, is more reserved in identifying the motivation behind iconoclasm in synagogues. The limited evidence we have for synagogue refurbishment into the eighth century, excepting a single aniconic example near Jericho, means that a more refined chronology of when figural schemes ceased to be commissioned is difficult to achieve. For the Synagogue of Jericho, see D. C. Baramaki, “An Early Byzantine Synagogue Near Tell Es-Sultan,” *QDAP* 6 (1936): 73–77.

65 On the Shellal mosaic see A. Taylor, “Diggers Accused of ‘Plundering’ Mosaic from Gaza,” *Sydney Morning Herald* (14 August 2011), <http://www.smh.com.au/national/diggers-accused-of-plundering-mosaic-from-gaza-20110813-1is5s.html> (accessed 1 May 2017).

66 Thus Piccirillo, “I mosaici di Santo Stefano,” 129–31, 142–43 and Ognibene, *La Chiesa di Santo Stefano*, 163–455.





Fig. 11. Madaba, Madaba Archaeological Park, Jordan. Mosaic removed from the Akropolis Church of Ma'in.

design), rather than its physical or social context (such as its location), that have assumed the pole position in the Palestinian iconoclast debate.

The implications of this problem have yet to be fully integrated into general discussions about the phenomenon. Indeed, arguments that see Palestinian iconoclasm as a development rooted in static enmity to “the figural image,” understood in the most essentialist and decontextualized terms, have contributed to sustaining broader theories which cite persistent hostility to figural representation among “Semitic” (often erroneously employed interchangeably with “Islamic”) populations, or tensions within the Judeo-Christian tradition, as among its contributing causes.<sup>67</sup> Such sentiments should be situated within the wider discourse, but in their current form, where the idea is often

applied indiscriminately to all known cases of hostility directed at images in Syria-Palestine (and indeed Egypt),<sup>68</sup> arguments of this sort risk drawing the debate back toward orientalizing projections of Levantine people as a uniform category characterized by homogeneous and chronologically static religious, social, and aesthetic attitudes. It is this particular sentiment, however, that has partly sustained direct comparisons between Palestinian iconoclasm and Umayyad decorative traditions, despite the fact that the contextual

67 Thus the idea of a sustained iconoclastic spirit among Abrahamic faiths has appeared most recently in Ribak, “Archaeological Evidence.”

68 Schick, *Christian Communities*, 206–7, notes the damage exacted upon stone sculpture in the monastery of Apa Jeremias. This is briefly alluded to in J. E. Quibell, *Excavations in Saqqara*, vol. 3, 1907–1908 (Cairo, 1912), iii, pl. 34 and idem, *Excavations in Saqqara*, vol. 4, 1908–1909, 1909–1910 (Cairo, 1912), i–vii, but not well published beyond a single image. This appears to show a fairly careful excision of two human subjects from a relief carving of a lintel. I am cautious about establishing its relationship to Palestinian iconoclasm, in view of the problems surrounding the dating of the activity and the limited number of published examples.

and developing nature of Islamic attitudes to figural imagery has been well acknowledged by scholars since the mid-twentieth century.<sup>69</sup> The distinction between the aniconic decorative programs of the Dome of the Rock and the abundant human and zoomorphic representations of Khirbet al-Mafjar or Qusayr Amra are well-trodden cases in point, and should continue to caution against assuming that uniform ideas about “the image” were maintained by Muslims during the eighth century even among single patron groups or families.<sup>70</sup> Neither can we overlook the fact that Islamic traditions of vegetal decoration were among the criticisms directed at Muslims by Christian writers in defense of their own traditions of sacred portraiture.<sup>71</sup> In this light, theories that stress Christian syncretism with Islamic aesthetic principles must be applied with a great degree of restraint.

Our analysis of Palestinian iconoclasm has proved slow to progress beyond aesthetics-based comparisons with “Islamic” decorative traditions largely owing to the limitations of the surviving data and how we approach it. Because of our tendency to isolate church mosaics from their physical context and focus on the aesthetics of design and theme, our analysis is often biased toward locating convenient visual (but not contextually compatible) parallels. Thus the apparent aniconic fervor of Palestinian iconoclasm finds a straightforward aesthetic counterpart in the decorative programs of Umayyad mosques constructed in the seventh and eighth centuries, notably the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Mosque of Damascus.<sup>72</sup>

69 K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, pt. 1, *The Umayyad Dynasty 622–750* (Oxford, 1933), 269–71 and R. W. Hamilton, “The Sculpture of Living Forms at Khirbat al Mafjar,” *QDAP* 14 (1950): 101.

70 On Khirbat al-Mafjar see R. W. Hamilton, *Khirbat al-Mafjar: An Arabian Mansion in the Jordan Valley* (Oxford, 1959) and H. Taragan, “Atlas Transformed—Interpreting the ‘Supporting’ Figures in the Umayyad Palace at Khirbat al Mafjar,” *East and West* 53 (2003): 9–29. On the decorative schemes of Qasr Amra see M. Almagro et al., eds., *Qusayr Amra: Residencia y baños omeyas en el desierto de Jordania* (Granada, 1975), 4–107, 151–96 and G. Fowden, *Qusayr ‘Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2004), 248–90.

71 Griffith, *Treatise*, 55.

72 M. Gautier-Van Berchem, “The Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and of the Great Mosque in Damascus,” in Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, 230–48, pl. 33–45. See also the extended studies mentioned in n. 22.

One effect of the “aesthetic” focus is that analysis of mosaics in Arabia and Palaestina has remained predominantly the preserve of art historians. Accordingly, both research agendas and output have remained weighted toward either the establishment of design typologies and dating, or the systematic description of individual thematic programs.<sup>73</sup> Having derived largely from studies of “Byzantine” mosaics in the region, approaches to Palestinian iconoclasm have, in turn, continued to perpetuate this aesthetics-driven approach, with the recent treatment of the church of Hagios Stephanos in Kastron Mefa’a, which embarks on a systematic cataloging of the excised subjects, offering a characteristic case in point.<sup>74</sup>

Nowhere is the need to acknowledge the legacy of archaeological antiquarianism more apparent than here, in our present inability to resituate the discussion of mosaic iconoclasm within the architectural environments of the churches from which such examples are recovered. This concern is largely a question of context. Floor mosaics represent the most durable component of Byzantine church decoration in the region, but structurally speaking the lowest of a church’s architectural registers. Mosaic also constituted a single element of a decorative framework that once comprised a diverse array of wall and apse ornamentation, alongside liturgical furnishing. As Henry Maguire has noted in earlier studies, the interpretation and meaning of floor designs for Byzantine audiences was established by their relationship to this wider repertoire.<sup>75</sup> The interpretation of floor mosaics as allegories of the mundane, terrestrial world was perpetually reinforced by the procession of sacred figures adorning the walls and apses, which served to visually articulate this relationship between the earthly and celestial hierarchies.

In the context of Palestinian iconoclasm, this observation is sobering. Of the eighty-seven known examples within the corpus, not a single component of the additional decorative apparatus of these churches survives in situ in complete form. What we confront with the iconoclastic mosaic, as a result, is essentially

73 The most recent systematic study of mosaic design appears in R. Hachlili, *Ancient Mosaic Pavements* (n. 45 above), with earlier and still highly influential treatment in Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*.

74 M. Piccirillo, “I mosaici di Santo Stefano,” 121–64.

75 H. Maguire, *Earth and Ocean: The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art* (University Park, PA, 1987), 2, 34–35, 67–72, 82–83.





Fig. 12. Kastron Mefa'a, Church of the Bishop Sergios, Jordan. Mezzanine walkway constructed over the floor mosaics. (Photo: J. Pickett)

a remote artifact isolated from the surrounding decorative mantles that once gave context and meaning to both the original images in mosaic schemes and the episodes of destruction later enacted upon them. This remoteness is commonly reinforced by the way in which we decontextualize Palestinian iconoclasm for public and scholarly reception. Thus the inclination to publish aerial photographs over uninterrupted “idealized” floor plans, construct mezzanine walkways over them (as at Kastron Mefa'a) (fig. 12), or detach panels for museum display has reinforced our distorted experience of the iconoclast mosaic and ratified its isolation from its accompanying visual and spatial framework.

Consequently, our understanding of Palestinian iconoclasm has been guided solely by what we understand of its impact upon floors (rather than “churches”) and has endorsed a number of problematic comparisons. For example, theories that stress Islamic coercion or aniconic influence upon Palestinian iconoclasm are driven, in essence, by a direct comparison between the decorative traditions of two separate architectural registers wrongly treated as interchangeable: floors and walls. The essential architectural distinction between

floors and walls is not irrelevant to the current debate. In terms of churches, the representations most antagonistic to Islamic sensitivities—those of holy figures or crosses—were more likely to have been found in programs adorning the walls and apse, and indeed the requirement for crosses to be removed from floors had already been fully expressed in the Acts of the Quinisext Council of 692 in Constantinople, around thirty years before the active period of Palestinian iconoclasm.<sup>76</sup> Given that only a single decorative wall scheme of a Byzantine church, that of St. Catherine's monastery, Sinai, survives in even partial form in the region, our interpretation of Palestinian iconoclasm as provoked by Umayyad decorative trends in mosques needs to take a more considered view of this basic contextual discrepancy.<sup>77</sup>

76 Mansi 11:976 (Canon 73).

77 For Sinai see J. Elsner, “The Viewer and the Vision: The Case of the Sinai Apse,” *Art History* 17, no. 1 (1994): 81–102; S. Coleman and J. Elsner, “The Pilgrim's Progress: Art, Architecture and Ritual Movement at Sinai,” *World Archaeology* 26, no. 1 (1994): 73–89; K. Weitzmann, I. Ševčenko, and F. Andereg, *The Monastery of Saint*

The decisions of the Quinisext council probably expressed a reservation that was generally held in some form throughout Arabia and Palaestina during the sixth century. Although not unknown, images of biblical figures are exceptionally rare in the decorative schemes of floors in the region (crosses are a little more common), and all those that survive are drawn from the Old Testament canon.<sup>78</sup> Programs inspired by the Gospel, or the succession of postcanonical figures, including saints, are unknown in the surviving floors of the region, although representations of Christ and the Virgin on apse schemes are attested in Palaestina Prima and Sinai by the sixth century, and alluded to in the dedicatory tabulae ansatae of some churches of Arabia around the same period.<sup>79</sup>

Fragments have also been identified that attest to other human and vegetal representation in Arabian and Palestinian churches, even if their limited survival prevents the reconstruction of a single decorative program in its entirety. Fresco pieces adorned with human faces and limbs have been identified at the North Church of Rehovot-in-the-Negev and the South Church of Sobata, with comparative examples of figures rendered in wall mosaic also known from the Petra Church.<sup>80</sup> A sizable fresco fragment featuring a haloed man, to which we shall return, was recovered during the excavation

of the Church of the Priest Wa'il in Kastron Mefa'a.<sup>81</sup> Further examples, featuring a hand and a face, were also recovered during the excavations of the Northeast and Northwest Churches of Hippos respectively, and appear related to the collapse layers associated with the Golan earthquake of 749, which the excavators propose ended the churches' occupation.<sup>82</sup>

Evidence from contexts postdating the eighth century also tentatively suggests that figural schemes on church walls continued to be commissioned throughout the early Islamic period before the establishment of the Latin Kingdoms in 1099. Among the most notable are the programs of the Laura complex of Deir Muqallik (traditionally identified as Mar Theoktistos), whose earliest schemes probably predate the mid-ninth century.<sup>83</sup> In more fragmentary form, fresco fragments of an angel from the Church of Mount Berenike, Tiberias, also provide some indication that figural schemes were still visible, if not commissioned, in the eleventh or early twelfth century.<sup>84</sup> To this we may add tentative reports of a painter active at the Church of the Anastasis in the ninth century, alluded to in a manuscript dated to 864, and the fragmentary (and no longer extant) murals of the church of Sebastia, loosely dated by John Crowfoot to the eleventh century.<sup>85</sup> General Islamic sensitivity to the

*Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian, Plates* (Ann Arbor, 1973), 11–18 and pl. 103, 128.

78 For discussion of the schemes of Ya'amun see Turshan, "The Magi" (n. 43 above); Turshan and Nassar, "A Mosaic of the Book of Daniel" (n. 52 above); and Nassar and Turshan "Geometrical Mosaic Pavements" (n. 39 above), 41–62. I am less certain whether the three figures represent the Magi, given that they do not appear to be accompanied by identifying *tituli*. Cf. also D. Baramaki, "A Byzantine Church," 134–35.

79 Choricus of Gaza, *Laudatio Marciani* 1:28–30 (p. 10); *Choricii Gazati opera*, ed. R. Foerster and E. Richtsteig (Leipzig, 1929). A translation of the relevant passage appears in C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1972), 62 and Di Segni, "Varia Arabica," 587–88.

80 The frescoes of the North Church, Rehovot-in-the-Negev are briefly discussed in Y. Tsafrir, "The Northern Church," in *Excavations at Rehovot-in-the-Negev*, vol. 1, ed. Y. Tsafrir (Jerusalem, 1988), 65–67. Those of Shivta are addressed in P. Figueras, "Remains of a Mural Painting of the Transfiguration in the Southern Church of Sobata (Shivta)," *Aram* 18–19 (2006–7): 127–51. The figural mosaics of the Petra Church are reproduced in T. Waliszewski, "Appendix D: The Wall Mosaics," in *The Petra Church*, ed. Z. Fiema et al. (Amman, 2001), 301, 328 n. 25.

81 This fragment was also noted in Signes-Codoñer, "Melkites and Icon Worship" (n. 21 above), 143. I am a little more optimistic than Signes-Codoñer about the dating of the fresco scheme than the "centuries later" range he proposes. The indications from the excavation report are that the site itself was occupied probably only into the late eighth or early ninth century, which would suggest that the scheme could have been executed only by this period at the very latest.

82 M. Schuler, "North-East Church" (n. 4 above), 45. This would imply that the scheme was still visible on the walls before the destruction. See also J. Radowska, "Mural Remains from the Martyrion Chapel in the North-West Church," in *Hippos-Sussita, Fifth Season of Excavations (September–October 2004) and Summary of All Five Seasons*, ed. A. Seagal et al. (Haifa, 2004), 76–77.

83 H. Goldfus, B. Arubas, and E. Alliata, "The Monastery of St. Theoktistos (Deir Muqallik)," *Lib.ann* 45 (1995): 274. This is also discussed in G. Kühnel, *Wall Painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Berlin, 1988), 184. This must remain tentative, however, given that analysis has focused predominantly on the dating of the late twelfth-century programs, which constitute most of the surviving decoration at the site.

84 R. Amir, "Mosaics and Frescoes," chapter 8 in Y. Hirschfeld, *Excavations at Tiberias, 1989–1994* (Jerusalem, 2004), 148–49.

85 A. Frowlow, "Le peintre Thomas de Damas et les mosaïques du Saint Sépulcre," *BEODam* 11 (1945–46): 121–30; J. Crowfoot, *Churches at Bosra and Samaria—Sebaste* (London, 1937), 30–31,

use of figural decoration in sacred space may not, then, have been formative in determining how Christians in the Caliphate continued to adorn their own buildings of worship between the eighth and eleventh centuries.<sup>86</sup>

As a result of its limited survival, the extent to which the wider decorative repertoire of churches was also subject to iconoclast erasure in the eighth century is difficult to assess. As noted earlier, it is clear from the corpus of liturgical furnishings recovered from some churches that images of animals, similar to those on floors, were also targeted for iconoclast censure. But whether this zeal was also directed at the sacred subjects adorning walls is less easily determined for the eighth century. Though not straightforward, this point of debate is fundamental for us to establish. For if the preservation of sacred images upon walls was intentional, it would render increasingly untenable hypotheses that attribute an underlying “Islamic” legislative or social influence to Palestinian iconoclasm, and draw our conclusions far closer to the idea that the phenomenon was provoked by an internal Christian dispute about the appropriateness of mundane figural subjects and personifications of natural phenomena (rather than holy portraits) which generally adorned spaces like church floors.

pl. 16. These were also alluded to in Kühnel, *Wall Painting*, 196 but were no longer visible by the 1980s. They may be connected, however, with the eleventh-century phase identified by the excavations.

86 Regrettably, with the exception of Mount Sinai and the Church of the Nativity, no churches in this region survive in their original pre-Crusader form. Churches that indicate more substantial continuity between the eighth and eleventh centuries, such as Hagios Georgios in Diospolis, the Tomb of the Theotokos, Gethsemane, and the Church of the Anastasis in Jerusalem were all substantially rebuilt in the twelfth century and have left little trace of their original decorative schemes. Both Kühnel and Hunt, however, have separately argued for the existence of a local painting tradition in the region which evidently predated these twelfth-century commissions: Kühnel, *Wall Painting*, 206 and L. Hunt, “Art and Colonialism: The Mosaics of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (1169) and the Problem of ‘Crusader’ Art,” *DOP* 45 (1991): 71. Earlier comments in this vein were made in E. Cruikshank-Dodd, “Notes on the Monastery of Mar Musa Al-Habashi, Near Nebek, Syria,” in *Crusader Art in the Twelfth Century*, ed. J. Folda, British Archaeological Reports International Series 152 (1982), 167–89. The earliest layer of fresco in this church is probably to be dated to 1058. It evidently predates the second layer, which is dated to 1110. In any case, fresco schemes featuring holy portraits continued to be commissioned in other regions of the Caliphate into the tenth century; see K. Innemée, “A Newly Discovered Painting of the Epiphany in Deir Al-Surian,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 14, no. 1 (2011): 63–85 and C. C. Walters, “Christian Paintings from Tebtunis,” *JEA* 75 (1989): 205–6.

Few surviving frescos have been recovered from churches whose mosaic floors also exhibit iconoclast activity. At least one example, however, confirms the impression that mosaic iconoclasm was intended to reinforce the visual dominance of schemes that adorned the apse. This example is a sizable fresco fragment from the apse of the Church of the Priest Wa’il in Kastron Mefa’a, which features a seated, haloed figure clasping a book and gesturing in benediction (fig. 13).<sup>87</sup> The fresco appears to have been still visible in the last phases of the church, for it was recovered from the collapse layer that effectively ended the use of the building in the late eighth or ninth century.<sup>88</sup> If this indeed was the case, then the image of the holy figure remained visible following the iconoclastic interventions exacted upon the donors’ portraits and hunting scenes which embellished the floor and chancel screen.<sup>89</sup>

Such fragments, then, point to an iconoclastic process in Kastron Mefa’a, and more tentatively across Arabia and Palaestina, aimed at effectively streamlining the visual repertoire of church buildings and focusing audiences’ attention on the sacred programs adorning the walls.<sup>90</sup> Such a hypothesis may also be reinforced if we interpret the inscription of the Church of the Theotokos, Madaba, dated to 767, as an allusion to an image of the Virgin adorning the apse.<sup>91</sup> This is impossible to determine from an archaeological perspective, although the recovery of a similar inscription from El-Rashidiyah, dated to 574, which also alludes to an image of the Virgin, lends support to this suggestion.<sup>92</sup>

87 Piccirillo, “La Chiesa del Prete Wa’il,” 318.

88 Ibid., 318. The report also notes that pickax marks were encountered on the fresco, leading the excavators to assume that this damage was done by iconoclasts at the same time as the interventions to the floor. This remains plausible, although I am more reserved about such a correlation. Such damage, which does not appear to have been repaired, contradicts the more sensitive interventions undertaken on the floor and liturgical furnishing in the church that generally characterize Palestinian iconoclasm. The reoccupation of the building for nonliturgical activity represents one alternative phase in which such activity could have occurred. Neither can we discount the possibility that the marks were made during the excavation of the church in the 1980s, given our poor knowledge of the excavation techniques at the churches of Kastron Mefa’a.

89 Maguire, “Moslems, Christians, and Iconoclasm,” 119.

90 Ibid.

91 Voiced most recently *ibid.*

92 Di Segni, “Varia Arabica,” 587–88.





Fig. 13. Kastron Mefa'a, Church of the Priest Wa'il, Jordan. Fragment of a haloed figure from the apse scheme of the church. (Photo: A. Michel, Institut Ausonius)

To fully withstand critique, such a hypothesis will require the recovery of additional examples. The methodological points raised by the fresco of the Church of the Priest Wa'il, however, are of more immediate relevance. Our understanding of Palestinian iconoclasm will be considerably improved by a more conscious attempt to resituate mosaic iconoclasm in the context of its wider architectural framework, and through a more sensitive and holistic approach to the excavation and recording of church buildings in the region.

### Iconoclastic Space

Approaching Palestinian iconoclasm from the perspective of its architectural context is also fundamental to addressing the apparent discrepancies in patterns of image destruction or preservation across the region. Understanding the architectural layout of a space, as it

would have appeared in the eighth century, can often explain apparent examples of image preservation or destruction, and is fundamental to understanding the contemporary visual environment to which iconoclasts intended to respond.

This cannot always be achieved seamlessly, for the majority of churches within the "iconoclastic corpus" were excavated before the recognition of Umayyad-period continuities in churches that has guided research since the 1980s.<sup>93</sup> As a result, iconoclast mosaics that

93 Over thirty churches in this corpus were excavated before 1980, and little discussion was devoted to their post-foundation phases. These include the churches of Al-Quwaysmah, Bahan, Ein Hanniya, Emmaus (North Church), Farah el-Hashimiya, Hesban, Gerasa, Jubeiha, Khirbat Asida, Khirbat el-Burz, Khirbat al-Samra, Madaba, Mahatt el-Urdi, Ma'in, Massuh, Mount Nebo, Muqawir, Nitl, Rihab, Roglit, Suhmata, Umm el-Manabi, and Zay el-Gharbi.



represent later phases of activity in a church environment often sit uncomfortably within the idealized architectural spaces that have emerged from the routine removal of features and layers not related to the earliest foundation phases of church buildings. Our understanding of the interplay between iconoclast mosaic and later architectural modifications is thus sometimes inadequately refined.

Ironically, mosaic as a medium has often been the underlying motivation for such indiscriminate excavation strategies. Attempts to recover the complete mosaic programs of church basilicas have frequently resulted in the removal of later features, such as partition walls or liturgical furnishings, that were intrinsic to how the building was used and actively experienced by Christian communities by the eighth century, and which thus provided the context for understanding the iconoclastic intervention.

For example, in the church of Bishop Sergios (Kastron Mefa'a), the excavator's removal of features associated with the ambo—attested only in photographs—presents the modern observer with an uninterrupted mosaic program that does not reflect the complex biography of the site following the sixth century (figs. 14, 15).<sup>94</sup> Here, the base of the ambo was lifted by excavators for the apparent purpose of recovering the complete mosaic motif that lay beneath it, and which had therefore escaped the iconoclastic erasure directed at the wider scheme. Visitors to the church in the present day, or those who consult photographs of such sites in mosaic catalogues, are consequently confronted with a series of motifs in mosaic floors that appear to have survived iconoclastic intervention as a result of having been decontextualized by the removal of their overlying architectural features. Such surviving motifs often reinforce a perception that Palestinian iconoclasm was erratic and inconsistent, although in the case of the Church of the Bishop Sergios it was far less obvious to contemporary viewers.

Similar concerns characterize the sites of Kursi and the triple church complex of Hagioi Kosmas and Damianos, Hagios Ioannes, and Hagios Georgios of Gerasa. At Kursi, the (now) visible subject of two birds flanking a bowl was, by the eighth century, located beneath a blocked doorway. Other surviving motifs of

birds and fish were also located beneath later partition walls, few of which are securely dated.<sup>95</sup> In Gerasa, the

95 The phasing of this site is called into question in D. Stacey, *Excavations at Tiberias, 1973–1974: The Early Islamic Periods* (Jerusalem, 2004), 15–17. The original excavator, Vasilios Tzaferis, dated the first destruction phase at the basilica to the Sassanian occupation, ca. 614: Tzaferis, “Excavations of Kursi-Gergesa” (n. 15 above), 15–16. Tzaferis identified a subsequent phase during which the images in the mosaic floor were removed, which he attributed to Arab squatter occupation (*ibid.*, 18). According to the report, the images were removed but not subsequently repaired. This appears to contradict the photographic evidence produced in the report, which seems to show the use of plaster or mortar to fill the cavities left by the extracted images. It is impossible to determine, however, whether this represents repairs undertaken after excavation. Problems with the Kursi report arise in part from the fact that Tzaferis chose to organize the publication of the pottery in terms of typology rather than stratigraphy. Tzaferis attributed this to the lack of a clearly defined stratigraphy in the church basilica and atrium (*ibid.*, 30–31). David Stacey's reappraisal of the site's ceramic assemblages proposed that the destruction phase, attributed by Tzaferis to 614, probably dates to the mid-eighth century and may indicate the first phase of destruction of the church as a result of the Golan earthquake of 749. Stacey suggests that activity at the site continued into the ninth century. The continued Christian occupation is probably confirmed by the mention of the site in the *Kitab al-Burhan*, erroneously attributed to the Patriarch Sa'id ibn Batriq. Samir Khalil Samir has made a convincing case that this work is to be linked to the Melkite Bishop Peter of Bayt Ra's, and was probably composed in the mid-ninth century: S. K. Samir “La littérature Melkite sous les premiers Abbassides,” *OrChr* 56 (1990): 469–86. Further discussion is offered in M. Swanson, “Ibn Taymiyya and the Kitāb al-Burhān: A Muslim Controversialist Responds to a Ninth-Century Arabic Christian Apology,” in *Christian–Muslim Encounters*, ed. Y. Haddad and W. Haddad (Gainesville, 1995), 95–107 and S. H. Griffith, “The View of Islam from the Monasteries of Palestine in the Early Abbasid Period: Theodore Abū Qurrah and the Summa Theologiae Arabica,” *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 7 (1996): 9–28. Robert Schick (*Christian Communities*, 5) is more cautious about the dating of the list of sites offered in the *Kitab al-Burhan*, arguing that it could reflect an earlier situation. The *Kitab al-Burhan* of Peter of Bayt Ra's identifies Kursi with the site of Jesus's Miracle of the Seven Loaves in Mark 8:1–9 and Matthew 15:32–39 and the Miracle of the Swine; Peter of Bayt Ra's, *Kitab al-Burhan*, 321 in Eutychius of Alexandria, *The Books of Demonstration (Kitāb al-Burhān) Part I*, trans. W. M. Watt, CSCO 193 (Louvain, 1961), 170; see also Eutychius of Alexandria, *The Books of Demonstration (Kitāb al-Burhān) Part I*, ed. P. Cachia, CSCO 210 (Louvain, 1961), 137. This interpretation is suggested by the iconography of the mosaics within the church, which depict a series of fish and small lozenge-shaped loaves in the mosaic scheme of the basilica. Furthermore, the two-handled basket motifs in the mosaic scheme may be plausibly identified as provision baskets (σπυρίδας). If this can be accepted, it further supports the association of the church with the miracle, given the use of the term in the gospel account of Mark 8:8: Καὶ ἔφαγον καὶ ἐχορτάσθησαν, καὶ ἦσαν περισσεύματα κλασμάτων ἑπτὰ σπυρίδας. This raises the

94 The lifting of the ambo of Bishop Sergios is attested in Piccirillo, “I mosaici di Santo Stefano,” 125, pl. 7, 8.



Fig. 14.  
Kastron Mefa'a, Church of the  
Bishop Sergios, Jordan, facing east.  
The image was taken during the  
excavation of the church. The base  
of the ambo may be seen to the  
right of the image. (Photo: Studium  
Biblicum Franciscanum)

Fig. 15.  
Kastron Mefa'a, Church of the  
Bishop Sergios, Jordan. The base of  
the ambo has been removed,  
leaving one of the original  
unaltered motifs exposed.







Fig. 16. Gerasa, Hagioi Kosmas and Damianos (left), Hagios Ioannes (center), and Hagios Georgios (right), Jordan. (Photo: Aerial Photographic Archive for Archaeology in the Middle East, APAAME\_20111002\_MND-0068.jpg)

blocking of the connecting entrances and arcades of the churches of Hagioi Kosmas and Damianos and Hagios Ioannes may also explain the apparent inconsistency of iconoclast activity among the three connected churches, with only the Church of Hagios Georgios exhibiting evidence for the removal of images from its floors (fig. 16). The blocking of the entrances to the Church of Hagios Ioannes from the Church of Hagios Georgios—only the baptistery remained in use, likely accessed from the east entrance on the upper street—and the reuse of the north section of the Church of Hagioi Kosmas and Damianos as a bathhouse indicate that neither building functioned continuously as a church following their foundation in the sixth

century.<sup>96</sup> Hence the figural mosaic decoration of both churches likely survived in a secularized—or at least nonliturgical—setting.

Similarly, in the main basilica of Mount Nebo, the remodeling of the “Old Diakonikon,” which involved partitioning the old baptistery into two rooms and blocking off the font, explains why the lower, now visible, scheme remained untouched, in contrast to the iconoclized schemes of the “New Baptistry” and “Theotokos” chapels flanking the south aisle.<sup>97</sup> Here, as

possibility that the site had a dual association with the Miracle of the Multiplication, associated with the main basilica, and the Miracle of the Swineherd, associated with the upper church integrated into the side of the nearby hill: see V. Tzaferis and D. Glick, “Appendix: The Chapel of the Miracle of the Swine,” in Tzaferis, “Excavations of Kursi-Gergesa,” 49–51.

96 On the blocking of the entrances and reuse of the Hagioi Kosmas and Damianos Church as a bathhouse see Crowfoot, “Christian Churches” (n. 15 above), 246–49.

97 E. Alliata and S. Bianchi, “The Architectural Phasing of the Memorial of Moses,” in *Mount Nebo: New Archaeological Excavations 1967–1997*, ed. M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata (Jerusalem, 1998), 168–71. These later structures were subsequently removed to facilitate uncovering the earlier figural mosaic. On the excavation and mosaics relating the “New Baptistry,” commissioned under Bishop Sergios, and the “Theotokos Chapel,” completed under his successor

with the examples of *Kastron Mefa'a* noted above, the excavators' removal of the later geometric floor of the "Old Diakonikon," in order to recover the more aesthetically appealing animated scheme of the earlier phase, has distorted our understanding of the Mount Nebo church as it appeared to its eighth-century occupants.

A further example, the Chapel of the Martyr Theodore—a component of the "Cathedral Church" complex of Madaba—saw the construction of a partition wall across the mosaic. This reveals a clear division of iconoclastic activity, with the images adjacent to the chancel preserved and those on the other side removed.<sup>98</sup> What these spaces were subsequently used for remains poorly known, although the apparent restriction of iconoclast activity to spaces that retained liturgical function may suggest that such subdivisions were due to the appropriation of some interior church space for non-liturgical roles. Parallel examples, involving the reuse of atrium spaces or church aisles for storage or economic production by the later sixth century at the Petra Church and the Northwest Church of Hippo, provide precedents for these later alterations and reuse of interior church space.<sup>99</sup>

The sites of Kursi, Gerasa, and Madaba are unlikely to be isolated cases, but I would argue that they are representative of the iconoclast churches where records of excavations are at least sufficient to identify later modifications to the internal space of the church basilica. Such examples provide a useful critique of excavation strategies that focus only on the recovery of mosaics, and of the restrictions that such an approach imposes on our understanding of the context of Palestinian iconoclasm with respect to post-Byzantine church environments. Essentially, the indiscriminate stripping of layers and features that do not conform to sanitized perceptions of the "early Byzantine basilica"

have limited our attempts to contextualize and understand an eighth-century response to images, by imposing an architectural and visual framework that church congregations after 700 may not have recognized.

These concerns play out across a considerable number of church buildings in the region, for the minimal attention paid to early Islamic-period occupation in many excavations has also created a corpus of churches whose mosaics escaped damage, but where we are unable to confirm whether their use continued into the eighth century alongside those churches targeted by iconoclasts. The churches of Khirbet al-Mukhayyat and Ayn Musa, situated within the same diocese as *Kastron Mefa'a*, Madaba, and Mount Nebo, offer one example of a group where final occupation dates are difficult to establish securely.<sup>100</sup> Consequently, the potential for interpreting these non-iconoclastic anomalies and situating them within the wider landscape of iconoclast churches—effectively to establish why they remained untouched—is limited and may never be fully realized.

Such ambiguity with regard to occupational phasing means that a more refined chronology for iconoclast activity, beyond the 720–760 bracket proposed by Susanna Ognibene, is also difficult to achieve. The censoring of the mosaic of the church at Jabaliyah (Gaza) may offer some narrowing of the period when activity commenced. Here, a figural scheme, dated by an inscription to 732, was later subjected to iconoclast intervention alongside the earlier sixth-century programs of the church's nave and aisles, which were also targeted by the iconoclasts.<sup>101</sup> In terms of when iconoclastic activity ceased, destruction levels, possibly associated with the Golan earthquake, provide tentative indications that some episodes of iconoclastic activity had occurred before 749/50, exemplified by the churches of Bishop Isaiah and Hagios Prokopios of

Leontios, see S. Saller, *The Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo*, pt. 1, *Text* (Jerusalem, 1941), 84–107 and E. Alliata and S. Bianchi, "Architectural Phasing," 176–79. Discussion of the mosaic programs of the two subsidiary buildings is available in Saller, *Memorial*, 229–42 and M. Piccirillo, "The Mosaics," in Piccirillo and Alliata, *Mount Nebo*, 296–304.

98 Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 117 and eadem, "La cattedrale di Madaba," *Lib.ann* 31 (1981): plan 1, photo 29.

99 Z. T. Fiema, "Re-constructing the History of the Petra Church: Data and Phasing," in *The Petra Church*, ed. Z. Fiema et al. (Amman, 2001), 79–80. See also J. Młynarczyk, "Churches and Society in Byzantine and Umayyad-Period Hippo," *Aram* 23 (2011): 257–58.

100 The latest excavations in these churches by the Franciscans have proposed that the churches of Khirbet al-Mukhayyat and Ayn Musa were all abandoned in the late seventh or early eighth century, before the currently accepted period of iconoclasm between 720 and 760; see M. Piccirillo, "The Churches on Mount Nebo: New Discoveries," in Piccirillo and Alliata, *Mount Nebo*, 221–64. The previous excavation of these churches, however, published in S. Saller and B. Bagatti, *The Town of Nebo (Khirbet El-Mekhayyat) With a Brief Survey of the Other Ancient Christian Monuments in Transjordan* (Jerusalem, 1949), means that such dating must be accepted cautiously.

101 Humbert, "Rivers of Paradise" (n. 31 above), 216–18, pl. 9.





Fig. 17. Kastron Mefa'a, Hagios Stephanos, Jordan. Chancel scheme dated to 756. (Photo: Sean Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar)

Gerasa, and possibly the Church of Hagios Theodoros of Horvat Hanot, none of which appears to have been reclaimed.<sup>102</sup> If we accept these parameters, we may approximate that the most fervent period of iconoclast activity occurred between the years 733 and 749.

The subsequent reclamation of a number of churches after the earthquake, including Kursi and Jabal Harun, does however raise the possibility that iconoclast activity continued beyond 750.<sup>103</sup> Here, excavations have identified destruction levels associated

with the Golan earthquake of 749 that were followed by the reclamation of the church space and continued liturgical activity into the ninth century.<sup>104</sup> Only the interventions at the Church of Hagios Stephanos, Kastron Mefa'a, and the "Theotokos Chapel" of Ayn al-Kanisah confirm the final stages of iconoclast activity in some regions around the late 750s. In both, repairs to the existing church floors which postdate the iconoclastic activity provide an approximate terminus ante quem for iconoclasm in the mid-eighth century. At the Church of Hagios Stephanos, Kastron Mefa'a, the earlier chancel mosaic scheme, presumably completed when the church was constructed in 718, was replaced by another dated to 756, which sat alongside

102 For Bishop Isaiah see V. Clark, "The Church of the Bishop Isaiah at Jerash," in *Jerash Archaeological Project 1981–1983*, ed. F. Zayadine (Amman, 1986), 313–14.

103 On the post-earthquake phase of Jabal Harun see E. Mikkola et al., "The Church and the Chapel: Data and Phasing," in Fiema and J. Frösén, *Petra*, 147–48.

104 On Kursi see Tzaferis, "Excavations of Kursi-Gergesa," 15–18. On the redating of these phases see Stacey, *Excavations at Tiberias*, 15.



the iconoclast nave and aisle schemes of the earlier 718 phase.<sup>105</sup> On a less ambitious scale, the entrance to the “Theotokos Chapel” at Ayn al-Kanisah was carefully repaired by integrating the replacement panel, dated to 762, with the existing, likely sixth-century, mosaic floor which had been subjected to iconoclast intervention.<sup>106</sup>

An important feature to stress about these later replacements is that all demonstrate a marked shift in mosaic design toward geometric patterns around 750. The chancel scheme of the Church of Hagios Stephanos (dated 756), for example, exhibits an array of guilloche patterns and eschews the more animate designs of the earlier nave scheme of 718 (fig. 17).<sup>107</sup> It finds a parallel in the scheme executed in the Church of the Theotokos in Madaba, dated to 767, again entirely geometric, which also appears to have replaced an earlier floor.<sup>108</sup> The trend of nonfigural mosaic programs after 750 may also be observed in the dedications of Mar Elyas and Khirbet es-Shubeika dated to 776 and 785 or 801/2 respectively.<sup>109</sup>

### Iconoclast Landscapes

Iconoclast churches did not of course exist in isolation. At 87 known examples, they represent less than half of the total corpus of 206 well-published floor schemes in the region surveyed for this study (table 2). Accordingly, the heavy concentration of iconoclast activity in particular regions of the provinces of Arabia Palaestina and, notably, around Jerusalem, Gerasa, and the Madaba plains provokes a number of questions about why the activity appears so regionally accented and not uniformly dispersed.<sup>110</sup>

The patterns of distribution may be in part constructs of modern archaeological interests. The legacies of biblical archaeology in particular have resulted in a

disproportionate concentration of survey and excavation in Jerusalem and its environs, and this trend has been exacerbated both there and around Amman, in modern Jordan, by more recent waves of urban expansion which have opened up opportunities for further excavation. Neither can the concentration of excavation activity in particular areas by individual archaeological units, such as that of the Franciscan Institute in the Madaba plains, be entirely discounted as a factor in shaping our current understanding of the iconoclast landscape.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that the interventions in the floors of Arabian-Palestinian churches in the eighth century were undertaken within a landscape characterized by a diverse range of both earlier and more recent responses to “floor decoration.” And whatever its origins, Palestinian iconoclasm was undoubtedly conditioned by the preexisting landscape of churches in the region, much of which had been established by the sixth century, over a century before the first interventions in churches took place, at some point after ca. 719.<sup>111</sup> A number of factors, then, are worth stressing for interpreting the contours of the decorative trends across churches in the region before the 720s.

The first is unquestionably geological. The former Byzantine provinces of Arabia and Palaestina are not a homogeneous geological unit, and the varieties of stone material one encounters differ considerably between the northern and southern extents of the region. This inevitably created discrepancies among individual settlements and regions in terms of patrons’ access to suitable resources for paving the larger surface areas of individual basilicas. These distinctions can be observed in the materials selected by patrons to adorn church buildings. In regions such as the Negev, which has a plentiful supply of high-quality limestone, such easy access to suitable materials is reflected in the decoration of the churches of Shivta and Nessana, and in the North Church of Rehovot-in-the-Negev, where the main spaces of the basilica, such as the nave and aisles, were paved with stone pavers of local material

105 M. Piccirillo, “Le iscrizioni di Kastron Mefa’a,” in *Umm al-Rasas, Mayfa’ah*, vol. 1, *Gli scavi del Complesso di Santo Stefano*, ed. M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata (Jerusalem, 1994), 241–47.

106 Piccirillo, “Le due iscrizioni” (n. 33 above), 527–30.

107 Piccirillo, “I mosaici di Santo Stefano,” 136–39.

108 Di Segni, “Date of the Church of the Virgin” (n. 3 above), 252.

109 On these see the relevant studies in note 3.

110 Although the inadequate attention paid to eighth-century phases in the excavation of churches provides some partial explanation for this, the distribution of non-Iconoclast churches with highly animated mosaic programs also conforms to this general geographical distribution.

111 This terminus post quem is taken from the dedication in the Akropolis Church of Ma’in. The dedication represents the latest dated mosaic scheme in the provinces of Palaestina and Arabia decorated with figural designs. At some point after its completion in 719, it was subject to iconoclast intervention. The mosaic is briefly discussed in De Vaux, “Une mosaïque Byzantine” (n. 44 above), 227–58.

and imported marble.<sup>112</sup> Similarly around the Galilee, which possesses natural concentrations of basalt, the churches of Hippos and the basilica of Kursi were predominantly paved or constructed with this locally available material and reflect a trend that evidently had its origins in the pre-Christian structures of the region.<sup>113</sup> In contrast, in areas such as the Madaba plains, which lack stone resources suitable for paving, church buildings exhibit far greater concentrations of mosaics as a flooring device, demonstrating how decorative trends during the Byzantine and Umayyad periods of an individual building converse with its geological context.

Geology offers one avenue for understanding the distribution of Palestinian iconoclasm, but to stress it exclusively would be unwise. Indeed, the ability of individual patrons or groups to circumvent local geological constraints by importing materials complicates the picture considerably and necessitates the analysis of patron economies and networks.

This is notable with respect to urban sites in the region, which generally exhibit far greater variation among church buildings in their size and the variety of materials for construction and decoration. At Gerasa, for example, marble, local varieties of stone, and mosaic all coexisted as part of the “landscape” of decorative programs among the twelve churches extant in the city by 611. The city’s three largest churches, the dual complex of the “Cathedral Church”/Hagios Theodoros and the Propylaea Church, were paved predominantly with stone.<sup>114</sup> In contrast, in the smaller churches like the Church of the Bishop Isaiah and the Church of Hagios Prokopios, both likely commissioned by private donors, mosaic was the predominant technique used to embellish the floors.<sup>115</sup> Mosaic also represents the medium most commonly used in most rural church decoration,

offering one potential explanation for the heavy concentration of iconoclast activity outside of urban areas. As noted earlier, seventy (80 percent) of the eighty-seven known examples of iconoclasm are located in villages or as part of solitary monastic buildings or *kastra* settlements, with only seventeen churches (20 percent) located within the walled boundaries of the region’s urban centres.

Yet, as a single medium, mosaic also varies widely in both technical complexity and design. Mosaics of plain tesserae, geometric patterns, or the highly complex nilotic or pastoral scenes can be observed, for example, among Gerasa’s twelve intramural churches; and similar variations may also be noted among churches in rural settlements, such as Kastron Mefa’a. As with stone, variations in mosaic design were undoubtedly formative in shaping the landscape of churches to which Palestinian iconoclasm responded. Why such variations exist and how they determined the distribution of iconoclast activity in Arabia-Palaestina is less clear, though new focus on the material properties of church decoration, and the patronage and economic systems that underpinned their creation, sheds some light on this issue.

### Palestinian Iconoclasm and the Economics of Decoration

Studies of mosaic in the region of Palaestina and Arabia are just beginning to tackle the complexity of the “mosaic economy” (notably in terms of price), and quantifiable estimates of mosaics’ cost have remained elusive beyond the most impressionistic of observations.<sup>116</sup> The expense of mosaic-laying in particular has remained implicit in more recent appraisals of cost, although such assumptions have rested upon a fairly broad use of the (still poorly understood) edict of Diocletian and a tacit belief that the complexity and time required to produce mosaic floors were evenly, if not fairly, reflected in wage structures and prices.<sup>117</sup> The application to Byzantine Arabia and Palaestina of economic models that assume that the value of the individual, and his or her labor and time, were socially

112 On Rehovot-in-the-Negev see J. Patrich, “Architectural Sculpture and Stone Objects,” in *Excavations at Rehovot-in-the-Negev*, vol. 1, *The Northern Church*, ed. Y. Tsafrir et al. (Jerusalem, 1988), 105. The Central Church of Nessana is addressed in D. Urmann, “Nessana Excavations 1987–1995,” in *Nessana: Excavations and Studies*, vol. 1, ed. D. Urmann (Beersheva, 2004), 70, 74–78, 89–90.

113 Tzaferis, “Excavations of Kursi-Gergesa,” 5, 14 and M. Schuler, “The North-East Church,” in *Hippos-Sussita: Fifth Season of Excavations (September–October 2004) and Summary of All Five Seasons (2000–2004)*, ed. A. Seagal et al. (Haifa, 2004), 93–94.

114 Crowfoot, “Christian Churches,” 213, 223, 229–30.

115 *Ibid.*, 261–62, 338–40.

116 M. Merrony, *Socio-Economic Aspects of Late Roman Mosaic Pavements in Phoenicia and Northern Palestine*, BAR International Series 2530 (Oxford, 2013), 70–75.

117 For a recent summary of the debate see *ibid.*

recognized and reflected in economic terms in any case requires more considered reflection elsewhere.<sup>118</sup>

The material evidence does, however, indicate one thing very clearly, namely, the comparatively modest status of mosaic by the sixth century. It is most frequently encountered in buildings commissioned by rural donors or individual patron families, and accordingly the overwhelmingly rural character of Palestinian iconoclasm that we perceive may to some extent be explained in the context of individual patron economies. The use of marble and other fine stone in the larger churches of the region, commonly in the technique of *opus sectile*, offers another indication of this. Examples from the larger churches of Gerasa (the “Cathedral Church” and Hagios Theodoros), Gadara (the Mausoleum Church and Terrace Church; fig. 18), and the “Petra Church,” or larger cult centers such as “Hagios Aaron” on Jabal Harun, are characterized by the predominant use of marble and other polished stone over mosaic in the floors of the main basilica.<sup>119</sup>

118 Merrony, for example, argues that more complex designs would have required larger work teams. Although I agree with this general principle, the highly organized system of labor proposed by the edict of Diocletian, used in Merrony’s (and earlier) assessments, may not be applicable in Arabian or Palestinian contexts. The evidence of family groups of mosaicists (frequently father/son or fraternal teams) suggests that the idea of a pro rata wage system, as implied by the edict of Diocletian, may be far more complex if examined from the perspective of individual family economies. We cannot, for example, disregard the possibility that payment for mosaic schemes was organized in terms of single payment rather than daily wages. The fact that the majority of the churches in the iconoclast corpus reflect commissions by private donors (rather than imperial or civic projects) may also complicate this picture considerably. In this respect, our evidence is simply not sufficiently detailed to gain a sense of how the building of a church was organized in terms of payment or labor.

119 On the use of *opus sectile* in the “Cathedral Church” of Gerasa and Hagios Theodoros see Crowfoot, “Christian Churches,” 213, 223. The flooring of the Petra Church is discussed in P. Bikai, “Appendix: Opus Sectile Pavement of the Nave, Chancel and Atrium,” and Waliszewski, “The Mosaics,” both in Fiema et al., *Petra Church*, 215–17 and 218–70 respectively. For the Church of “Hagios Aaron” on Jabal Harun see E. Mikkola et al., “Church and Chapel,” in *ibid.*, 112, 127. For the churches of Gadara see K. Vriezen, “The Centralised Church in Umm Qais—Ancient Gadara,” *Aram* 4 (1992): 371–86; K. Vriezen et al., “Umm Qays-Gadara: The Large Terrace in the First Millennium,” in *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 7, ed. G. Biseh (Amman, 2001), 537–45 and T. Weber, “The Excavation of the Five-Aisled Basilica at Umm Qays: A Preliminary Report,” *AAJord* 42 (1998): 443–56. For an overview of the churches of Pella and Abila, all of which utilized *opus sectile*,

In both the Gerasa “Cathedral Church” and the Church of Hagios Theodoros, the spaces of the chancel and nave were embellished with marble and other types of decorative stone which was subsequently stripped following the abandonment of the church buildings, and at both sites the use of mosaic in auxiliary chambers and other marginal areas indicates the more modest status accorded it in comparison to stone.<sup>120</sup> Parallel examples west of the River Jordan, at the Nea Church of Jerusalem, the North Church of Rehovot-in-the-Negev, and the Church of Hagioi Sergios and Bakkhos of Nessana supplement this impression.<sup>121</sup> The prestige of marble was to some extent predicated upon its rarity. As the Levant possesses no natural source of marble, all examples in the region represent products of import.<sup>122</sup> When such imports occurred, and from where, is less straightforward to determine. Marmaran quarries from around the island of Prokonnessos appear the most likely source, and one that has some support from petrographic studies conducted upon chancel screens recovered from northern Jordan.<sup>123</sup> Yet the ubiquitous use of marble in the pre-Christian constructions of the region’s urban centers also suggests that some marble work in churches was undertaken using spolia extracted from earlier buildings. This has been suggested for a number of features in the Petra Church and also those of the Northwest Church of Hippos.<sup>124</sup>

see M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan* (Amman 1993), 328–32. On the church of Petra see Bikai, “Appendix,” 215–17. The mosaics of the Petra Church are addressed in T. Waliszewski, “Mosaics.”

120 Crowfoot, “Christian Churches,” 213, 223.

121 The flooring of the Nea Church is addressed in O. Gutfeld, “Chapter Five: The Nea—Stratigraphy and Architecture,” in O. Gutfeld, *Jewish Quarter Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem Conducted by Nahman Avigad, 1969–1982*, vol. 5, *The Cardo (Area X) and the Nea Church (Areas D and T)* (Jerusalem, 2012), 176. On the North Church of Rehovot-in-the-Negev see Tsafir, “Northern Church” (n. 80 above), 36.

122 For additional comments see B. Russell, *The Economics of the Roman Stone Trade* (Oxford, 2013), 151–54.

123 M. Al-Naddaf, K. Al-Bashaireh, and F. Al-Waked, “Characterization and Provenance of Marble Chancel Screens, Northern Jordan,” *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry* 10, no. 2 (2011): 75–83.

124 On spolia in the Petra Church see C. Kanellopoulos and R. Schick, “Marble Furnishings of the Apse and Bema, Phase V,” in Fiema et al., *Petra Church*, 193. On Hippos see J. Młynarczyk and M. Burdajewicz, “Excavation of the North-West Church Complex (Areas NWC and OPB),” in *Hippos (Sussita), Third Season of Excavations, July 2002*, ed. A. Seagal et al. (Haifa, 2002), 16.





Fig. 18. Gadara (Umm Qays), Octagonal Terrace Church with Opus Sectile flooring, Jordan.

The more common occurrence of marble paving and stone work in urban churches, then, was apparently facilitated by the ready supply of material from earlier civic structures. Despite this, the concentration of opus sectile work in the larger and more ambitious churches of urban centers, as in Gerasa, suggests that the reuse of marble material was not freely available to all church patrons, raising the possibility that the despoliation of pre-Christian structures may have been overseen at a civic level, paralleling activities known from other Mediterranean contexts in the same period.<sup>125</sup>

Marble offers one signal of potential variations in the ability of patrons to access a wider range of decorative materials beyond mosaic, but the use of other varieties of stone in opus sectile work and paving add nuance to this debate. How such alternative materials were perceived in relation to marble, in terms of expense or

prestige, is difficult to establish.<sup>126</sup> The issue, however, is partly a creation of contemporary scholars, resting on our tendency as archaeologists and architectural historians to apply modern principles of cataloging to the material assemblages recovered during excavation.

From a modern perspective, the term “marble” is neatly understood to denote a particular type of stone that can be identified by a distinct geological signature. The Greek term *μάρμαρον*, however, from which the modern English equivalent derives, is far more fluid in its application and may denote a variety of decorative stone materials which modern analytical methods traditionally separate.<sup>127</sup> Consequently, determining how individual patrons or audiences viewed the distinction between “geological marble” and other stone materials such as limestone and porphyry is difficult to establish

125 On the edict of Majorian, for example, see B. Ward-Perkins, *From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages: Urban Public Building in Northern and Central Italy AD 300–850* (Oxford, 1984), 45.

126 For a discussion of cost see Russell, *Roman Stone Trade*, 23–36.

127 J. B. Ward-Perkins, “Materials, Quarries and Transportation,” in *Marble in Antiquity: Collected Papers of J. B. Ward-Perkins*, ed. H. Dodge and J. B. Ward-Perkins (Rome, 1992), 13–14.



securely in Byzantine contexts in Palaestina and Arabia. We may posit, however, that the relative rarity of particular types of stone was probably a key factor in determining their prestige, particularly in regions where such materials could not be sourced locally. The use of marble and porphyry in the Petra Church, for instance, must have distinguished the decoration of the church in a region largely defined by its sandstone formations.<sup>128</sup> The substitution of purple porphyry for a more locally quarried purple limestone in the church also indicates attempts to maintain this distinct aesthetic in light of shortages of the desired resource.<sup>129</sup>

Setting aside the question of stone typology, the spatial context of stone material in churches alludes to its privileged status over alternatives such as mosaic. This hierarchical arrangement is most notable in churches where floors were rendered in a combination of stone and mosaic. The use of opus sectile and stone was retained primarily for the chancel and nave, with the floors of more peripheral spaces such as the aisles and narthex paved more frequently in mosaic. This can be observed in a number of examples in varying regional contexts, implying that such patterns cannot be explained exclusively in terms of regionalized aesthetic preference or variations in patrons' ability to obtain suitable stone resources. At the Petra Church, a predominantly opus sectile nave and chancel scheme was flanked by two aisle mosaic panels featuring a vine scroll motif—a pattern mirrored at the nearby complex of “Hagios Aaron” on Jabal Harun, where the marble-paved basilica was entered via a narthex chamber embellished with a nilotic-themed mosaic.<sup>130</sup> Further north in Gerasa, notably in the integrated complex of the “Cathedral” and Hagios Theodoros churches, side chapels and connecting passages were similarly rendered in mosaic while the more important areas of the chancel and nave were paved with opus sectile work in marble and other fine stone. In other churches in the city, such as the Propylaea, stone was also reserved for the chancel and nave, with mosaic employed for

auxiliary chambers.<sup>131</sup> Further indications that stone materials were prized over other alternatives emerge from the more selective use of such material in churches of more modest status. The Bishop Isaiah Church of Gerasa for example, commissioned by a single family, headed by Beroios and his wife Eulampia, was paved predominantly with mosaic carpets that were later subject to iconoclast intervention.<sup>132</sup> The floors of the main chancel and side chapels, however, were furnished with stone flooring made of polished limestone tiles (fig. 19). Even here the adoption of such decorative material was hierarchical and selective. Whereas the bema floor of the main chancel was completely paved in limestone, in the two subsidiary chapels only the floor space adjacent to the apsidiole was embellished with the same material, leaving the remaining space of the chapel bema to be decorated in mosaic.<sup>133</sup>

The Church of Hagios Prokopios, also in Gerasa, exhibits a similarly selective placement of such material: a main chancel paved with marble and limestone tiles flanked by two side chapels and a nave paved by mosaic. Excavations in the church also revealed that architectural elements such as the *synthronon* were plastered and painted to resemble red-veined marble, presumably to emulate the visual impression of marble revetment.<sup>134</sup>

Examples such as these offer a corrective to the assumption that the contours of the iconoclastic landscape of Arabia-Palaestina established through archaeological research may be accepted uncritically as the outcome of political or religious forces. Two examples of mosaic schemes are instructive in this respect: that of the south chapel of the “Cathedral Church” of Gerasa and that of the narthex of “Hagios Aaron” on Jabal Harun near Petra. Both were in peripheral areas of church buildings and both were subject to iconoclast intervention. In the south chapel of Gerasa, personifications of the calendar months, set into a simple grid pattern, were extracted by iconoclasts and repaired with plain white tesserae. At Jabal Harun, a

128 Bikai, “Appendix,” 215.

129 Ibid.

130 Mikkola et al., “Church and Chapel,” 112, 127; Hamarneh and Hinkkanen, “Mosaic” (n. 25 above), 246–62; Bikai, “Appendix”; and Waliszewski, “Mosaics,” 218–70. The dating of the final occupation of the Petra Church to the early seventh century, probably as a result of a fire, explains why its schemes remain intact.

131 For the “Cathedral” and Propylaea Churches see Crowfoot, “Christian Churches,” 213, 223, 229–30 and Biebel “Mosaics” (n. 50 above), 309, 312. Discussion of the Bishop Isaiah Church is offered in Clark, “Church of the Bishop Isaiah,” 311.

132 Clark, “Church of the Bishop Isaiah,” 120.

133 Ibid.

134 Crowfoot, “Christian Churches,” 261.



Fig. 19. Gerasa, Church of the Bishop Isaiah, Jordan. Southern apse with stone paving. (Photo: Aerial Photographic Archive for Archaeology in the Middle East 2011, APAAMEG\_20111021\_mnd-0135.jpg)

less sensitive process involved digging a running channel across several motifs and repairing the cavities with coarse limestone tesserae.

The principal importance of both sites is that these iconoclast interventions in mosaic floors were undertaken in church complexes that were otherwise almost exclusively paved with stone. Had neither of these peripheral mosaic schemes survived, neither the “Cathedral Church” at Gerasa nor “Hagios Aaron” of Jabal Harun would have been identified as “iconoclast” churches by their excavators. The schemes thus epitomize how the social and economic conditions that determined the nature of church buildings during their periods of active use contribute to shaping archaeologists’ impression of the iconoclast landscape in the present day.<sup>135</sup>

135 Biebel, “Mosaics,” 309, 312. On Jabal Harun see Harmarneh and Hinkkanen, “The Mosaic,” 246–62.

Beyond individual buildings, this insight has broader implications for how we interpret the distribution of iconoclast activity on a regional level. Rural churches may dominate the iconoclast corpus (sixty-five [79 percent] are located in isolation or as part of *kastra* settlements), but this nucleation of iconoclast activity, notably in the Madaba plains, reflects in part the concentrated use in such churches of mosaic, over alternate materials common in the embellishment of the larger stone-clad urban churches of the region (fig. 20).<sup>136</sup> Mosaic was evidently more readily available than stone

136 The only church in the Madaba plains that appears to have used *opus sectile* in its decoration is the “Cathedral Church” of Madaba; see M. Piccirillo, “La cattedrale di Madaba” (n. 98 above), 319 and plates 4–5. In *Kastron Mefa’a*, only the Church of the Tabula Ansata appears to have been paved in stone as opposed to mosaic, along with some of the subsidiary churches attached to the Bishop Sergios/Hagios Stephanos complex. M. Piccirillo, “La Chiesa della Tabula Ansata” (n. 42 above).

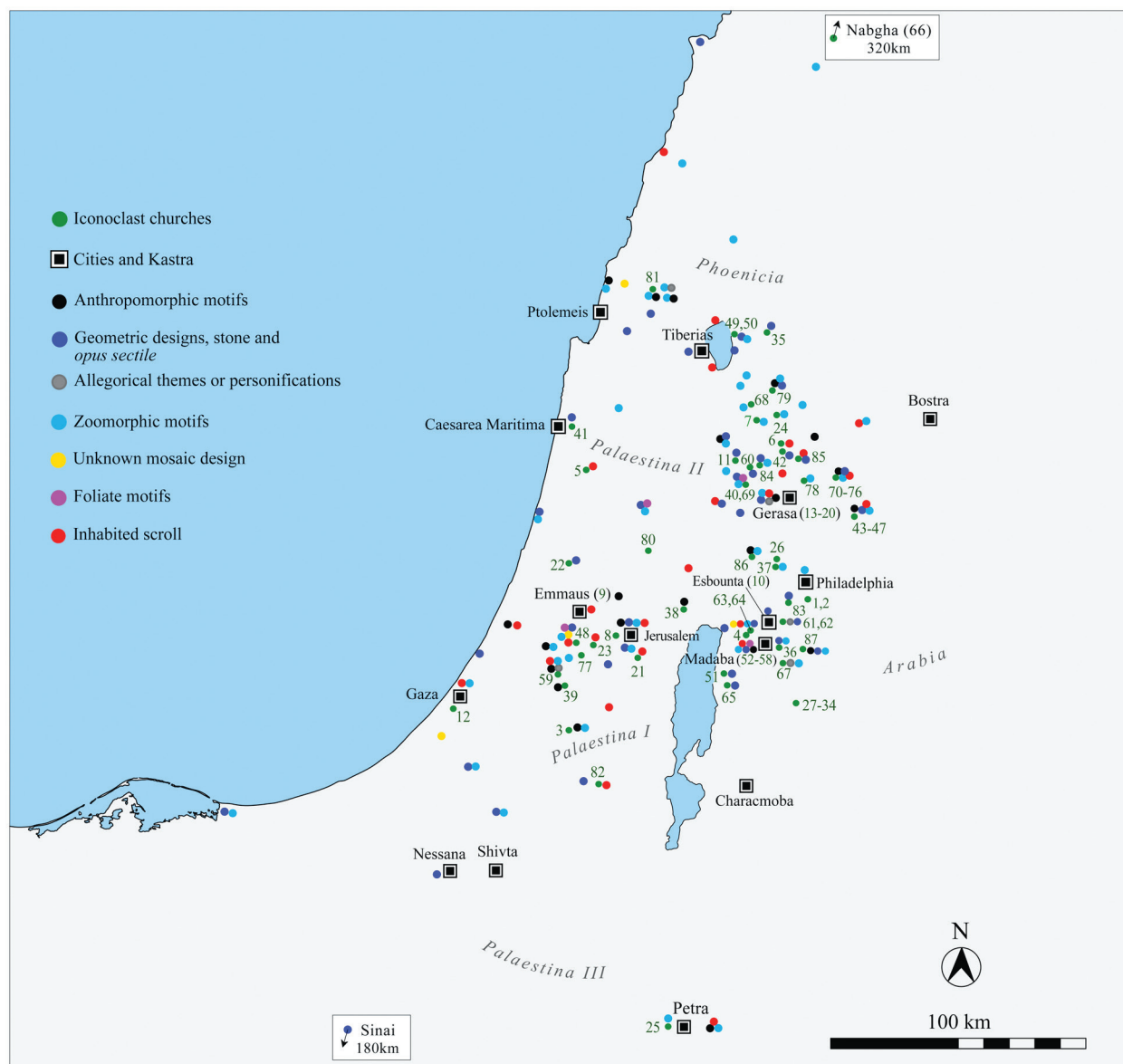


Fig. 20. Map of sites in Arabia-Palaestina featuring nilotic/agrarian mosaic schemes or opus sectile or stone floors. This map documents 206 churches known from publication (some in the same locations).

alternatives to the networks of rural donors invoked in church dedications across the region, and accordingly the extent of iconoclastic activity is simply more easily recognized and charted among such communities by the research methods employed by contemporary scholars. This does not mean, however, that the demand to remove images from mosaics was not equally prevalent among the larger urban communities of Arabia and Palaestina, but simply that the materials through which we may identify it are more ephemeral and substantially cruder.

Acknowledging the role of patron economies and networks in shaping the iconoclast landscape is one aspect of this debate, but it should not be stressed exclusively. Whereas areas with high numbers of animated mosaics show that some regions were forced to respond more intensively to images later seen as offensive, geographically isolated iconoclast churches clearly indicate that the ideas that designated such images as inappropriate in churches were prevalent across many parts of the region, and even in areas with far fewer



problematic schemes. From Suhmata to Petra, at the northern and southern extremes (some 185 km apart), an almost identical concern with and response of both communities to the question of figural representation on mosaic floors prompts a number of questions about the factors that clearly connected them. The challenge for current scholarship is how we might interpret such connections.

## Interpreting Palestinian Iconoclasm

### *An "Iconoclast" Community? Episcopal Networks in Byzantine and Umayyad Arabia-Palaestina*

Previous research has not refined the identity of the iconoclast communities of Palaestina and Arabia beyond the broadest label of "Christian." Because no attempt has been made to trace a connection between any of the iconoclast churches, it has generally been assumed that the phenomenon reflects either a concern held universally among all Christian groups in the Caliphate, or an initiative sponsored by regionally isolated groups in response to highly localized pressures.<sup>137</sup> Yet the degree of uniformity among the mosaic interventions across the region, in terms of the mosaic themes targeted for attack and the manner in which such subjects were neutralized, hints at an underlying unified set of ideas. Where these ideas derived from and how they were disseminated is less clear.

Mosaic inscriptions, a previously unexamined source, and stone epigraphy, particularly in the form of dedicatory tabulae ansatae shed some light on the identity and organization of iconoclast communities and indicate that the concern had strong ties to episcopal authorities. Besides including the names of donors, dedicatory inscriptions are frequently dated, and often identify the reigning bishop of the diocese that administered the church and its community (table 3). The Madaba diocese offers a particularly complete regional group of iconoclast churches, with a well-preserved epigraphic record suitable for drawing such connections; the churches of Gerasa and Rihab provide similar, though more tentative, parallels. To these we now turn.

137 For varying opinions see the studies cited in note 5.

### *The Madaba Plateau: Kastron Mef'a, Madaba, and Mount Nebo*

The names of two bishops of Madaba—Sergios, active from the 570s until the 590s, and his successor Leontios, active from ca. 600 and still attested in 608—appear most frequently in church dedications in the region and reflect the general waves of settlement expansion in the area which coincided with their terms in office (table 2).<sup>138</sup> Both Sergios and Leontios are attested at the coenobitic monastic site at the summit of Mount Nebo (the "Memorial of Moses"), a site associated with the burial of Moses from at least the late fourth century and still acknowledged by Chalcedonian "Melkite" writers in their descriptions of the region in the ninth century.<sup>139</sup> The dedication of the "New Baptistry" in 597 (which may have coincided with the resurfacing of the former baptistry on the north side noted earlier) is dated explicitly in reference to the tenure of Sergios as bishop.<sup>140</sup> The later "Theotokos Chapel," commissioned between 600 and 608, is dated by the reign of his successor, Bishop Leontios.<sup>141</sup> In both auxiliary chapels, the allegorically themed mosaic pavements that adorned the chancels were among the first examples of iconoclast activity in the region identified by archaeologists.<sup>142</sup> The offending motifs—in these examples images of gazelles and oxen alluding to the prophecy of Isaiah—were neutralized by picking out and scrambling their individual tesserae.

138 The date of 607/8 appears in the dedication of church of Hagios Elias in Madaba where Bishop Leontios is named. On the inscription see M. Piccirillo, *Chiese e mosaici di Madaba: Documentazione grafica a cura di P. Eugenio Alliata* (Jerusalem, 1989), 69. On the general boom in church building during the reigns of bishops John, Sergios, and Leontios see S. Saller, "The Works of Bishop John of Madaba in the Light of Recent Discoveries," *Lib.ann* 19 (1969): 145–67 and M. Piccirillo, "The Activity of the Mosaicists of the Diocese of Madaba at the Time of Bishop Sergios in the Second Half of the Sixth Century AD," in *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 5, ed. H. Hadidi (Amman, 1994), 391–98.

139 P. Geyer and O. Cuntz, eds., *Itinerarium Egeriae*, 12.1–3, CCSL (Turnhout, 1965), 52. A translation is available in J. Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels* (Oxford, 1999), 12.1–3, 121. See also Peter of Bayt Ra's, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, 382 (ed. Cachia 1960:206, trans. Watt 1960:162).

140 L. Di Segni, "The Greek Inscriptions," in Piccirillo and Alliata, *Mount Nebo*, 434.

141 Ibid.

142 Saller, *Memorial of Moses* (n. 97 above), 229–41.

Table 3. Dioceses and bishops identified from iconoclast churches.

IC No.	Diocese	Site	Church	Bishop
65	Areopolis?	Muqawir	Bishop Malechios	Malechios
43	Bostra	Khirbet al-Samra	Hagios Georgios	Theodoros
42	Bostra	Khirbet al-Samra	Hagios Ioannes	Theodoros
67	Bostra	Rihab	Hagia Sophia	Polyeuktos
73	Bostra		Hagios Ioannes	Polyeuktos
71	Bostra		Hagios Konstantinos	Polyeuktos
68	Bostra		Hagios Paulos	Polyeuktos
69	Bostra		Hagios Petros	Polyeuktos
76	Bostra		Hagios Sergios	Sergios
12	Gaza	Gaza-Jabaliyah		Markianos
13	Gerasa	Gerasa	“Cathedral Church”	Paul, Marianos
14	Gerasa		Hagios Georgios	Paul
15	Gerasa		Bishop Isaiah	Isaiah
16	Gerasa		Hagios Prokopios	Paul
18	Gerasa		“Synagogue Church”	Paul
19	Gerasa-Zaghrif		Hagia Sophia	Paul
4	Madaba	Ayn al-Kanisah	Theotokos Chapel	Job
27	Madaba	Kastron Mefa'a	Bishop Sergios	Sergios
28	Madaba		Church of the Lions	Sergios
29	Madaba		Church of the Palm Tree	Sergios
30	Madaba		Church of the Priest Wa'il	Sergios
31	Madaba		Church of the Reliquary	Sergios
32	Madaba		Church of the Rivers	Sergios
34	Madaba		Hagios Stephanos	Sergios (II?), Job
53	Madaba	Madaba	“Cathedral Church”	John, Sergios, Leontios
54	Madaba		Elianos Crypt?	Sergios
55	Madaba		Hagios Elias	Leontios
57	Madaba		Martyr Theodore	John
63	Madaba	Mount Nebo “Memorial of Moses”	“New Baptistry”	Sergios
64	Madaba	Mount Nebo “Memorial of Moses”	“Theotokos Chapel”	Leontios
86	Madaba?	Zizia	“Bishop John”	John
36	Philadelphia?	Khilda-Amman	Hagios Varos	George
6	Unknown	Dariya	Hagioi Kosmas and Damianos	Kasseios
81	Unknown	Suhmata		John and Kyriakos
83	Unknown	Tel Umaryi	Hagios Sergios	Polyeuktos

Sergios and Leontios are also invoked across a number of churches that exhibit similar episodes of iconoclastic activity throughout Madaba and Kastron Mefa'a. Bishop Sergios is known from five churches in Kastron Mefa'a—the Church of the Bishop Sergios, the Church of the Lions, the Church of the Reliquary, the Church of the Priest Wa'il, and the Church of the Rivers—all of which offer parallel cases of iconoclast intervention.<sup>143</sup> Of the remaining eight churches in Kastron Mefa'a, one postdates his tenure (Hagios Stephanos, completed in 718), four were embellished with stone floors rather than mosaic, and the remaining three—Hagios Paulos, the Chapel of the Peacocks, and the Church of the Palm Tree—are not sufficiently preserved to allow a full reconstruction of their respective dedicatory inscriptions.<sup>144</sup> Yet the presence of iconoclasm in the latter three churches, and the fact that the Church of Hagios Paulos and the Church of the Palm Tree are dated to the reign of Bishop Sergios, imply a connection between these churches and the five more securely contextualized examples within the settlement. Bishop Sergios is also known from a series of dedications in Madaba, the location of the episcopal see. The first commemorates the paving of the courtyard

of the iconoclasted “Cathedral Church” in the city; the second is in the Crypt of Hagios Elianos, flanking the dekumanos of the settlement.<sup>145</sup>

Bishop Leontios is less visible in the epigraphic record than his predecessor, with his name currently identified only among churches in Madaba, excepting the dedication of the “Theotokos Chapel” of Mount Nebo noted above.<sup>146</sup> It is clear from at least one dedicatory inscription that during Leontios's tenure renovations were undertaken to the “Cathedral Church” at Madaba, and completed in 603 with the laying of a mosaic floor, later subjected to iconoclastic action. Leontios also appears in the dedication of the iconoclast church of Hagios Elias (dated 607/8), which connects with the crypt of Hagios Elianos, completed in 595/96 during the reign of his predecessor Bishop Sergios, and which may offer a further example of iconoclast activity.<sup>147</sup>

Inscriptions identifying earlier bishops in churches throughout the region place the tenures of Sergios and Leontios within an established line of episcopal succession. Bishop John, possibly the immediate predecessor to Sergios, is named in the “Cathedral Church” of Madaba within the Chapel of the Martyr Theodoros (dated 572), where personifications of the four rivers of paradise were also picked out by the iconoclasts.<sup>148</sup> The mention of a bishop named John in the

143 Both Sergios and Leontios are attested in church dedications of three settlements in the diocese of Madaba: Kastron Mefa'a, Mount Nebo, and Madaba itself. The dedications that mention Sergios in Kastron Mefa'a are the Church of the Bishop Sergios (Piccirillo, “Le iscrizione di Kastron Mefaa” [n. 44 above], 258–59), the Church of the Lions (Piccirillo, “La Chiesa dei Leoni” [n. 42 above] 219–20; and the Church of the Priest Wa'il (Piccirillo, “La Chiesa del Prete Wa'il” [n. 42 above] 322). The inscriptions of the remaining iconoclastic churches of Hagios Paulos, the Church of the Palm Tree, and the Church of the Rivers are too poorly preserved to identify the name of the reigning bishop. All, however, are dated to Sergios' episcopacy; see Piccirillo, “La Chiesa di San Paolo” (n. 42 above), 393 and Bujard, Piccirillo, and Poiatti-Halldimann, “Les églises géminées d'Umm er-Rasas” (n. 42 above), 296.

144 For Hagios Stephanos see Piccirillo, “Le iscrizione di Kastron Mefaa,” 244. The churches embellished with stone floors are the Courtyard Church, the Church of the Aedicula, the Church of the Tabula Ansata, and the Church of the Reliquary. On the Church of the Aedicula and the Courtyard Church see Piccirillo, “Gli scavi del complesso di Santo Stefano” (n. 42 above), 78–82, 92–94. For the Church of the Tabula Ansata see Piccirillo, “La Chiesa della Tabula Ansata” (n. 42 above), 289–90, and for Hagios Paulos Piccirillo, “La Chiesa di San Paolo,” 388. The Church of the Palm Tree and the Church of the Rivers can be found in Bujard, Piccirillo, and Poiatti-Halldimann, “Les églises géminées,” 296–97. On the Church of the Reliquary see M. Piccirillo, “La chiesa del Reliquario a Umm al-Rasas,” *Lib.ann* 56 (1992): 375–88.

145 Sergios and Leontios are both attested in the inscriptions of the “Cathedral Church”; see M. Piccirillo, “La cattedrale di Madaba,” 303–8. Both also appear in the Church of Hagios Elias and the Crypt of Hagios Elianos, dated to 607/8 and 595/96 respectively. See Piccirillo, “La chiesa del profeta Elia a Madaba: Nuove scoperte,” *Lib.ann* 44 (1994): 381–404; Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan* (n. 51 above), 120–25. The mosaic of the crypt has evidently suffered considerable damage since its initial recovery, although the damage enacted upon one of the sheep in the crypt apse, and upon a bird in one of the lunettes, may provide an additional example of iconoclasm. Iconoclasm has been reported for the upper church of Hagios Elias, which is connected to the lower church via a stairway; Piccirillo, “La chiesa del profeta Elia,” 387–88 and photos 6–9.

146 Di Segni, “Greek Inscriptions,” 432–33.

147 See note 131.

148 Only one, the Euphrates, appears to have remained untouched. Images in only one half of the chapel appear to have been mutilated, leaving those in the chancel and nearest the dedicatory tabula ansata untouched. This may be related to the construction of a secondary wall across the mosaic, which effectively split the chapel into two separate chambers. The iconoclastic activity's apparent respect for this boundary may indicate that it postdated the interventions, and may also allude to changing uses of the chapel space



iconoclast church of Zizia (some 15 km east of Madaba) may offer a related example.<sup>149</sup>

In sum, what we may note about the iconoclast churches of the Madaba plains whose mosaics date to the sixth century is that the patrons who commissioned them evidently identified themselves as communities linked to the episcopal see based in Madaba. Evidence that would enable a comparative understanding of episcopal succession in the decades leading up to the suggested period of iconoclast activity (ca. 720–ca. 760) is more limited, and reflective largely of the amount of epigraphic evidence dated to the seventh century in the Madaba plains following 610. The hiatus is interrupted, however, by the dedication of Hagios Stephanos in Kastron Mefa'a, constructed in 718 during the reign of Sergios (II?).<sup>150</sup> Sergios's episcopate is known only from this single inscription, but the intentional incorporation of the Hagios Stephanos church into the existing sixth-century basilica—known to modern excavators as the Church of the Bishop Sergios (Sergios II's predecessor)—implies a conscious attempt by the eighth-century community of Kastron Mefa'a to situate its patronage within an existing communal and ecclesiastical superstructure. It is evident from at least one inscription in the 718 scheme of the church of Hagios Stephanos, commemorating the monk Kaïoum of Phisga (one of the satellite settlements surrounding Mount Nebo by the sixth century), that the community of Kastron Mefa'a had maintained communication with other ecclesiastical establishments and regions of the Madaba episcopate throughout the early decades of Umayyad rule.<sup>151</sup> The identification in the 756 chancel scheme of the mosaicist Staurakios of Esbounta (also Esbous, modern Hesban), also a settlement where iconoclast

activity is known, confirms these continued contacts beyond the active period of iconoclastic activity.<sup>152</sup>

The name of the bishop invoked in the subsequent renovation of the chancel scheme at Hagios Stephanos offers a more certain indication that connections between Kastron Mefa'a, Mount Nebo, and the Madaba episcopate were maintained throughout the main period of iconoclast activity between 718 and 756. The inscription inlaid into the chancel mosaic, dedicated in 756, identifies Job as the reigning bishop under whose authority the scheme was completed.<sup>153</sup> Job also appears in an additional inscription which accompanies a partial renovation to the "Theotokos Chapel" (dated 762) located in Ayn al-Kanisah, near Mount Nebo, undertaken after the images from the earlier sixth-century mosaic had been removed. These iconoclast interventions remained visible alongside the new eighth-century panel dedicated during Job's tenure as bishop of Madaba.<sup>154</sup> This indicates that the communities of Kastron Mefa'a, Madaba, and Mount Nebo, who continued to use "iconoclasted" church buildings, also continued to define themselves as part of the same established episcopal community before, during, and after the active period of iconoclast activity between 718 and 762.

The inscriptions of Hagios Stephanos also suggest that some images were removed from mosaic floors during a period when churches remained under the patronage of the same familial donor networks who had commissioned the original schemes. One of the donors, identified as John, son of Lexos, priest and archon of Kastron Mefa'a, is listed and depicted among a number of donors in the tabula ansata set into the 718 scheme.<sup>155</sup> Elias (son/grandson of?) Lexos, seemingly another member of the "Lexos" family, appears in the dedication accompanying the 756 renovations in the chancel.<sup>156</sup>

A collective reading of the inscriptions of Hagios Stephanos and of other churches in the Madaba diocese

by the eighth century. The wall was not fully discussed in the report of Michele Piccirillo, for which see Piccirillo, "La cattedrale di Madaba," 299–332. Photographs of the wall and a plan do, however, appear in idem, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 117, pl. 109, 111. For a survey of the churches conducted in the reign of Bishop John see Saller, "Works of Bishop John," 145–67.

149 M. Piccirillo, "La Chiesa del Vescovo Giovanni a Zizia," *Lib. ann* 52 (2002): 367–84.

150 Piccirillo, "Le iscrizione di Kastron Mefaa," 244–46.

151 Ibid., 251. The site of Phisga is described in the *Life of Peter the Iberian*. See C. B. Horn and R. R. Phenix, ed. and trans., "John Rufus, *Life of Peter the Iberian*," in *John Rufus: The Lives of Peter the Iberian, Theodosius of Jerusalem, and the Monk Romanus* (Atlanta, 2008), 72–73.

152 Piccirillo, "Le iscrizione di Kastron Mefaa," 251. The iconoclastic mosaic panels of Hesban are discussed in J. Lawlor, "The Historical/Archaeological Significance of the Hesban North Church," in *Hesban After 25 Years*, ed. D. Merling and L. T. Geraty (Berrien Springs, MI, 1994), 125.

153 Piccirillo, "Le iscrizione di Kastron Mefaa," 242.

154 Ibid.

155 Ibid., 244.

156 Ibid., 243.

identifies two important features that may in the coming decades prove key to developing a more nuanced profile of iconoclast communities. First, Palestinian iconoclasm was undertaken by communities that evidently identified and situated themselves locally under the same episcopal authority. In the case of the Madaba–Kastron Mefa'a–Mount Nebo group, each of the known iconoclastic churches was under the episcopate of Madaba both before and after the active period of iconoclastic activity in these churches. Donors and mosaicists also continued to circulate between these settlements into the 750s. This suggests that our understanding of how iconoclastic sentiment was transmitted throughout the region warrants further reflection from the perspective of the institutional church infrastructure, rather than as a phenomenon initiated by disparate rural or urban groups.<sup>157</sup> Nor can we overlook the possibility that the bishops themselves may have been responsible for initiating the interventions within their own dioceses.

Further, as suggested by the example of Kastron Mefa'a, the family lineages evident in both the 718 and 756 schemes imply that the interventions to images in mosaic floors were made when some patron families responsible for commissioning the original schemes still actively supported the church buildings. Rather than a change of occupancy or use of such buildings, this continuity indicates a decisive shift in decorative preferences for churches among the generations active between 718 and 762.

### *Beyond Madaba: Gerasa to Bostra*

The exceptional preservation of epigraphic material from the Madaba region is not found elsewhere, which means that similarly detailed observations are difficult to establish for other regional contexts. Nevertheless, similar, though more chronologically concentrated, regional networks of “iconoclast” churches whose patrons considered themselves part of a defined episcopal authority are visible in Gerasa and on the outskirts of the city in Rihab and Khirbet al-Samra.

Three churches in the boundary walls of Gerasa that feature prominent examples of mosaic iconoclasm—namely Hagios Georgios (dated 529/30), Hagios Prokopios (526), and the “Synagogue Church” (530/31)—were all constructed during the tenure of Bishop Paul, whose authority is invoked in the dedicatory tabulae ansatae accompanying these buildings.<sup>158</sup> Paul is also attested in an inscription accompanying a renovation to the fountain court portico in the city’s “Cathedral Church” complex, where traces of iconoclast activity have also been noted in the small chapel flanking the court’s southeastern edge (fig. 21).<sup>159</sup> A further example, the Church of Hagia Sophia (dated 542/43) at Zaghrat, on the outskirts of Gerasa, also invokes Bishop Paul in its dedication and attests to the extension of iconoclast activity beyond the city walls.<sup>160</sup> Similarly, in Rihab and Khirbet al-Samra, ten churches, eight of which offer known examples of iconoclasm, invoke Archbishop Polyuktos of Bostra (active ca. 590s–ca. 620s) and his successor Theodoros (active ca. 630s) in their dedicatory inscriptions.<sup>161</sup>

158 A discussion of these churches and their mosaic floors can be found in Crowfoot, “Christian Churches” (n. 15 above), 234–41, 245–46, 260–62 and Biebel, “Mosaics” (n. 50 above), 323–24, 329–30, 338–40. The inscriptions are reproduced in C. B. Welles, “Inscriptions,” in Kraeling, *Gerasa* (n. 50 above), 473–91. Plans of the mosaics and accompanying illustrations are also reproduced in Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 288–93. Two other churches, Hagios Kosmas and Damianos and Hagios Ioannes, are also dated to the time of Paul; Welles, “Inscriptions,” 479–82.

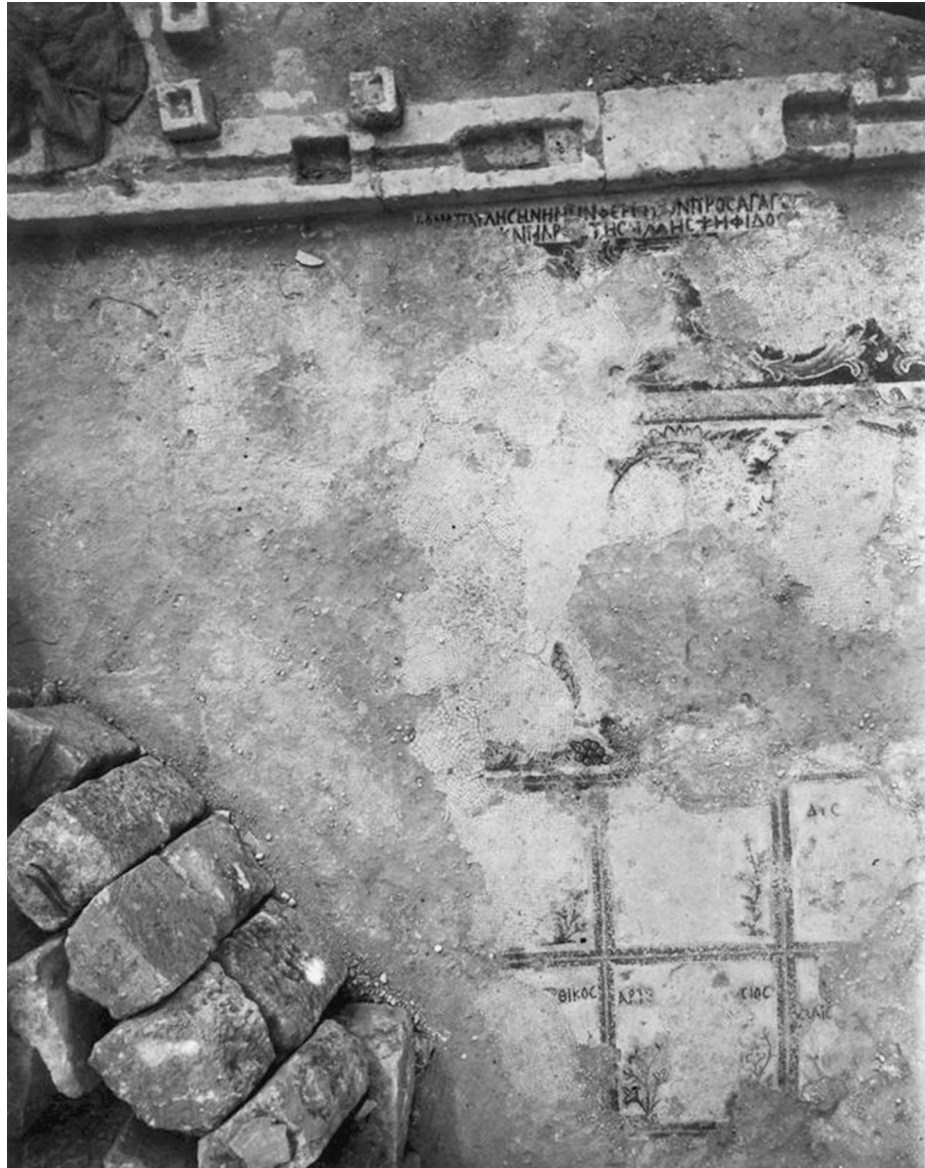
159 Iconoclastic activity in the chapel appears to have concerned removing personifications of the months; see Biebel, “Mosaics,” 312–13. On the dedication of Bishop Paul see Welles “Inscriptions,” 474 (inscription 293).

160 A. al-Rahim Hazim, “The Church of Hagia Sophia in the Territory of the City of Gerasa,” *Lib.ann* 53 (2003): 437–39.

161 The churches dedicated during the tenure of Bishop Polyuktos are Hagios Basilios (594), Hagios Paulos (595), Hagia Sophia (605), Hagios Stephanos (623), and Hagios Petros (623), all in Rihab. The inscriptions of these churches are reproduced in Piccirillo, *Chiese e mosaici della Giordania settentrionale* (n. 42 above), 66–90. Earlier treatment of these inscriptions appeared in Avi-Yonah, “Greek Christian Inscriptions from Rihab” (n. 16 above), 68–72. Two churches in Rihab are dated to the tenure of Bishop Theodore: Hagios Menas (635) and Hagios Isaiah (635?). The church of Hagios Menas exhibits no evidence of iconoclastic intervention, having been decorated in entirely geometric forms; see Piccirillo, *Chiese e mosaici della Giordania settentrionale*, 74–76. Color images of the mosaics of Rihab are reproduced in Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 310–13. Very few of these churches have been published in systematic form. The most complete account is that of Hagios Menas; see U. Wagner-Lux,

157 The mosaicist of the apse scheme of Hagios Stephanos (dated to 756) is identified as Staurakios the mosaicist of Esbounta (Hesban). The earlier 718 scheme also mentions the donation of Kaïoum, monk and priest of Phisga. See Piccirillo, “Le iscrizione di Kastron Mefaa,” 244, 251.

Fig. 21.  
Gerasa, “Cathedral  
Church,” Jordan, south  
chapel. (Photo: Yale  
University Archives)



Our understanding of these comparative networks is more impressionistic than is our knowledge of their counterparts in the Madaba episcopate, due

“Der Mosaikfußboden der Menas-Kirche in Rihab,” *ZDPV* 83 (1967): 34–41 and S. Mittmann, “Die Mosaikinschrift der Menas-Kirche in Rihab,” *ZDPV* 83 (1967): 42–45. For Khirbet al-Samra, the tenure of Bishop Theodoros is represented by the construction of three churches: Hagios Ioannes, Hagios Georgios, and Hagios Petros, each of which was subject to iconoclast activity. Two further cases of iconoclasm, in the undated “Chapel of Anastasios” and “the Egumen Chapel,” may be added to this list; see Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 304–9.

primarily to the paucity of later inscriptions that would confirm that such sites remained under the control of the Bostra diocese until the mid-eighth century. Episcopal networks and associations among iconoclast churches are also far more difficult to reconstruct beyond the Transjordan—reflecting the exceptional level of preservation in the Transjordan, but equally the intensity of church-building in single villages, at Kastron Mefa’a, Khirbet al-Samra, and Rihab, which facilitates the reconstruction of these networks.

Iconoclast churches in the region formerly encompassed by the territories of Palaestina often



appear in isolation, and connections between rural and urban church buildings, unlike those of the Madaba plains, are more difficult to establish in these regions due to the limited survival of Byzantine structures in the urban sprawl of Jerusalem and Gaza, where similar concentrations of iconoclasm appear on the outskirts of the modern cities. While the inscriptions suggest connections among iconoclast communities in individual urban and rural groups, any clear indication that these individual communal clusters also recognized a common identity across the entire region of Palaestina and Arabia is elusive. Evidence that would firmly establish these communities within the framework of a single confessional group is fragmentary. No complete lists of bishops survive for the region, and the sporadic attendance of Palestinian bishops at regional and ecumenical councils between the fifth and eighth centuries adds an additional layer of complexity. Evidence that iconoclasm was closely linked to the debates of the Chalcedonian church is not entirely absent, however, even if little of it is uniform in terms of dating or form.

#### *The Chalcedonian Connection?*

The first observation to be made here concerns geography. The nucleation of iconoclast activity in the former provinces of Palaestina and Arabia, and its apparent respect for these regional boundaries, implies that the impetus for the phenomenon was likely to have been generated from within the region, rather than externally imposed by the central authority in Damascus. The iconoclast churches we can identify, moreover, fall within the geographical boundaries of the dioceses recognized by the Chalcedonian church, rather than the administrative units of the Bilad al-Sham established by the Umayyads.<sup>162</sup> This is most explicit in the examples of the Madaba diocese which, administratively speaking, were within the boundaries of the Jund Dimashq. Although examples may be identified in the areas of Jund Dimashq that once belonged to Arabia and Palaestina Secunda (namely around Philadelphia and Bostra), similar episodes

of iconoclasm cannot be identified north of Galilee, despite the existence within this eighth-century administrative boundary of animated church schemes commissioned as late as 722.<sup>163</sup>

One final point is that a large proportion of such churches fall within regions answerable to the authority of the Jerusalem Patriarchate (fig. 22). These include those of Jerusalem, Elusa, Gaza, and Petra, and presumably those rural sites situated in the hinterlands of Pella and Scythopolis in former Palaestina Secunda.<sup>164</sup>

It remains difficult to know how many of the bishoprics survived into the active period of iconoclasm by 720, although the general high rate of church occupation throughout the early eighth century should caution against assuming that the more drastic organizational changes observed for the ninth century have a precedent in the Umayyad period.<sup>165</sup> We know from the Church of the Theotokos, for example, that the episcopacy of Madaba continued to function as late as 767, with a number of others, including Dora, Esbounta, and Philadelphia, still attested in sources for the mid-seventh century.

Bostra, together with the related churches of the province of Arabia, offers the only exception to this Jerusalem-centric organizational pattern, and its relationship to the Jerusalem Patriarchate by the eighth century is difficult to establish. Although the metropolinate of Bostra was placed under the control of Antioch following the Council of Chalcedon, Wilhelm Hotzelt has proposed a possible transfer of it to the authority of Jerusalem in the mid-seventh century.<sup>166</sup> Whether Hotzelt's thesis is to be accepted will require considerably more discussion than is possible here.<sup>167</sup> Yet we may note that the close proximity of a number of the Antiochene dioceses to Jerusalem, including Gerasa, Hesban, and Madaba, likely resulted in a more fluid relationship between the metropolitanate of Bostra and the patriarchate of Jerusalem. The

162 A. Walmsley, "The Administrative Structure and Urban Geography of the Jund of Filastin and the Jund of Al-Urdunn: The Cities and Districts of Palestine and East Jordan during the Early Islamic, Abbasid and Early Fatimid Periods" (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 1987).

163 Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises byzantines* (n. 37 above), 45–53.

164 Mansi 7:119–20.

165 On the possible reorganization of the region's bishoprics see M. Levy-Rubin, "The Reorganisation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem," *Aram* 15 (2003): 197–226.

166 W. Hotzelt, "Die kirchliche Organisation Palästinas im 7. Jahrhundert," *ZDPV* 66 (1943): 72–84.

167 One contrasting view is offered in A. Alt, "Zur kirchengeschichte Palästinas," *ZDPV* 67 (1944): 82–101.

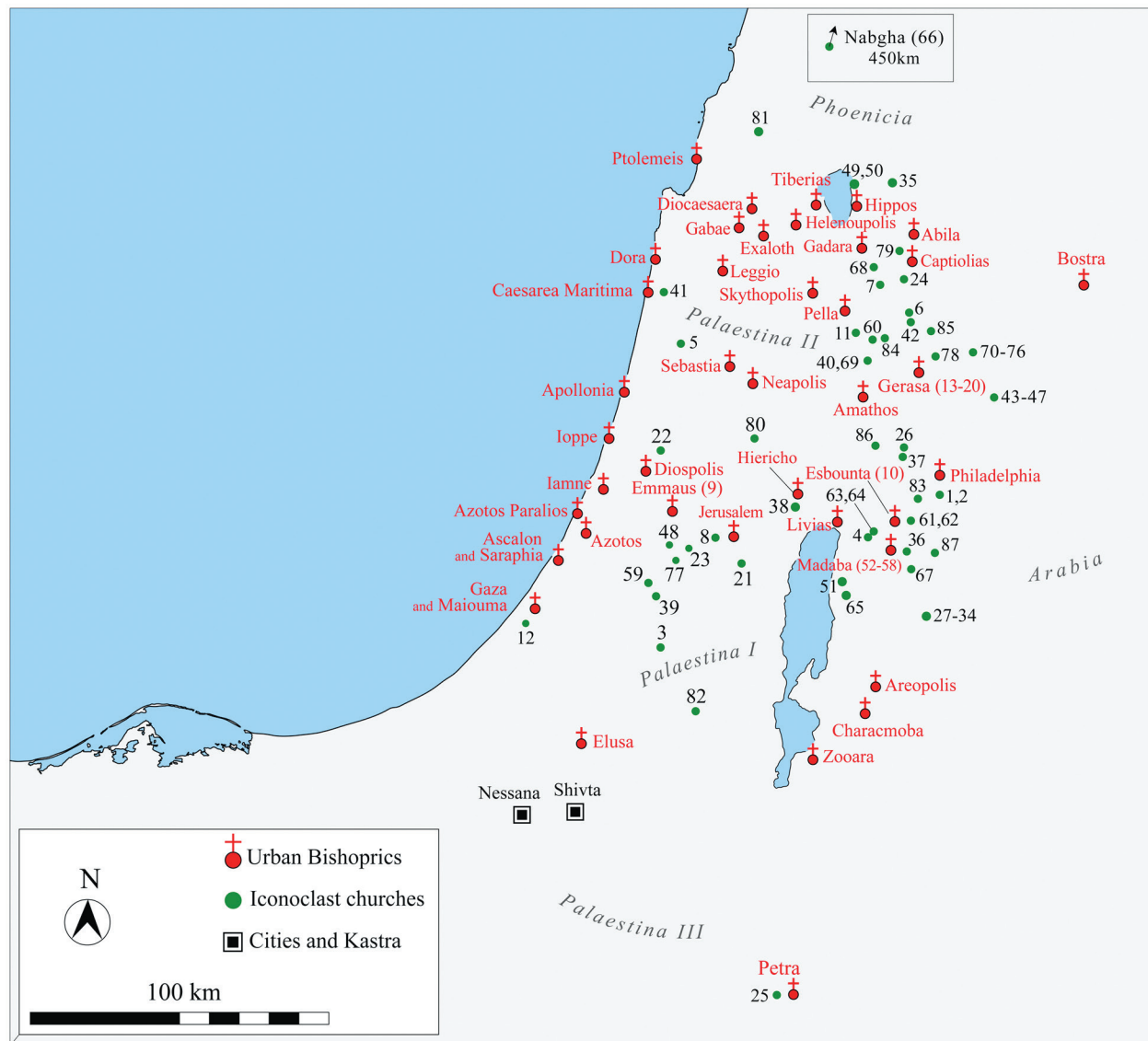


Fig. 22. Map of iconoclast churches in relationship to the known Chalcedonian bishoprics of the Byzantine period.

*Life of Stephen of Mar Sabas* (completed after his death around 796), by way of example, presents several episodes where the clerical ranks of the Mar Sabas monastery or the retinue of the Jerusalem Patriarchate were drawn from regions traditionally under Antiochene control.<sup>168</sup> The close involvement of Arabian dioceses

with the affairs of those in Palaestina reached its most coherent expression in the mid-seventh century, when the bishop John of Philadelphia was elected by Pope Martin as papal *vicarius* in an attempt to resolve disputes that had arisen within Palaestina in the wake of the Lateran Council of 649. This was accompanied by a further letter from Pope Martin to Theodore, bishop

168 The extensive connections of Mar Sabas during the eighth century are exemplified in the *Life of Stephen of Mar Sabas*, where the monastery is placed at the center of an extensive social network of elite and clergy from the urban centers of the Caliphate. Leontios

of Damascus, *Life of Stephen of Mar Sabas* 23.9, 25.1, 30.1, 30.2, 39.2, 43.1, 49.1, 52.1, 57.3, 73.1, ed. and trans. J. C. Lamoreaux (Louvain, 1999).





Fig. 23. Gerasa, “Cathedral Church,” Jordan, Hagios Theodoros and the Baths of Plakkos. (Photo: Aerial Photographic Archive for Archaeology in the Middle East, APAAME\_20130428\_REB-0129.jpg)

of Esbous (Hesban), requesting his support for John’s election and offering thanks for his support of Stephen, bishop of Dora.<sup>169</sup> In the context of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the fluid interaction between the ecclesiastical administrations of Palaestina and Arabia may provide some indication as to why the phenomenon of iconoclasm is localized primarily to churches in the Transjordan, and with only a single exception does not appear to have extended further north into the province of Syria. The issue, it seems, appears to have been limited to the metropolitanate of Bostra, whose affairs, as we have seen, had often been sensitive to the internal disputes of the church in Jerusalem.

The second observation is drawn primarily from the limited range of textual material that identifies

the confessional leanings of bishops attached to particular iconoclast churches. The earliest of these relates to Plakkos, bishop of Gerasa, who appears as a signatory to the acts of the Council of Chalcedon in 451.<sup>170</sup> Plakkos is also attested in Gerasa in an inscription adorning the completion of a bathhouse, dated to 454, that was directly connected to the existing “Cathedral Church” by a series of passages, and later to the complex of Hagios Theodoros, probably constructed in the 490s.<sup>171</sup> Combined, the three structures constituted the largest ecclesiastical superstructure in the city into

170 Mansi 6:217–18. Translation available in R. Price and M. Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon* (Liverpool, 2007), 2:10,54 (p. 281).

171 Welles, “Inscriptions,” 475 (inscription 296). On the bath itself see C. S. Fischer, “Buildings of the Christian Period,” in *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis*, ed. C. H. Kraeling (New Haven, 1938), 265–69.

169 An excellent overview is offered in P. Booth, *Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2013), 202–7.



the eighth century (fig. 23). Two additional features of this site are worth stressing.

First, the evidence noted earlier from the south chapel of the “Cathedral,” which is located opposite the internal entrance to the Baths of Plakkos, identifies the Christian community resident in the church in the eighth century as iconoclast.<sup>172</sup> Second, the refurbishing under Bishop Paul of the fountain court portico that connected the two churches identifies the church as one that evidently considered itself part of the same episcopal authority as a number of sixth-century churches in the city which exhibit clear cases of iconoclasm.<sup>173</sup> Of Bishop Paul’s dedications we may note the intramural iconoclast churches of Hagios Georgios, Hagios Prokopios, and the “Synagogue Church,” along with the Church of Hagia Sophia located on the outskirts of the city.<sup>174</sup>

So it is clear that in Gerasa, churches apparently affiliated with Chalcedonian orthodoxy in the fifth and possibly sixth centuries sustained iconoclastic intervention in the eighth. The obvious question is whether the Gerasene church continued its Chalcedonian affiliation into the Umayyad period. Evidence for continued Chalcedonian possession of these churches into the mid-eighth century is more problematic, as is a more detailed understanding of episcopal succession within the city. The only seventh-century bishops known to us are Bishop Marianos and Bishop Genesios, both of whom are difficult to place within the assemblage of earlier bishops connected with churches that were later subject to iconoclast intervention.<sup>175</sup> This is due largely to the nature of the churches constructed during his tenure, both of which were embellished with geometric carpets, and thus form part of the larger corpus of churches where concerns about images cannot be tracked archaeologically.<sup>176</sup> But an inscription set into an architrave recovered from the “Cathedral Church” in the city may clarify this connection. It is only partially preserved, but informs us that the architrave was set during the

“time of the most holy Marianos.”<sup>177</sup> The section that may have identified Marianos as bishop no longer survives, but the convention of the epithet ἀγιωτάτος to denote a bishop is seen in a number of dedicatory inscriptions across the Transjordan.<sup>178</sup> If this attribution is accepted, the inscription would identify a later phase of renovation of the “Cathedral Church” during the tenure of Bishop Marianos, and place his commission within a legacy of episcopal patronage at the site represented by the earlier bishops Plakkos and Paul. The design of the small chapel in the “Cathedral” (later subject to iconoclast intervention) also suggests that it belongs to a phase of late sixth-century renovation, and confirms continued investment in the site in the decades that preceded or coincided with Marianos’s reign. If Marianos is to be identified as the correspondent of Pope Gregory, in a letter dated to 601, it would further confirm the continued Chalcedonian custody of the site into the first decades of the seventh century.<sup>179</sup> The discovery of a church whose dedication invokes Marianos, near the hippodrome of Gerasa, for which three dates are possible (572, 587, and 602), may further support this hypothesis once it has been fully published.<sup>180</sup> The episode is in any case not without precedent, for still in the 640s epistolary exchange between Arabia and Rome is known to have continued, from the correspondence between Pope Martin and Theodore, Bishop of Esbous (incidentally, another iconoclast settlement).<sup>181</sup>

177 Welles, “Inscriptions,” 474 (inscription 289). The inscription reads: — — ]ν χρόνων Μαρριανού τοῦ ἀγιωτ(άτου) [.

178 For example in the church dedications of Rihab, completed between the late sixth and early seventh centuries. The use of the term may indicate a slightly later innovation in the region; see Piccirillo, *Chiese i mosaici*, 68–71.

179 On the letter, *Gregorii I Papae Registrum Epistolarum*, MGH Ep. 2, Lib 8–9, ed. P. Ewaldi and L. M. Hartman (Berlin, 1892–99, repr. 1957), 11:20. A translation is available in J. Martyn, *The Letters of Gregory the Great* (Toronto, 2004), 754–55. This example places the later epistolary exchange between Pope Martin and Theodore, Bishop of Esbous (Hesban), in the 640s, within a continued dialogue between Chalcedonian communities in Palestine and Arabia and those of Rome; Pope Martin, *Epistola ad Joanne Episcopum Philadelphiae*, PL 87:153–64; idem, *Epistola ad Theodorum Episcopum Esbuntiorum*, PL 87:164–65.

180 A. Hazim and M. Piccirillo, “Papa Gregorio e Mariano Ves-covo di Arabia,” *Lib.ann* 53 (2003), 439–40. Further discussion of Pope Gregory’s involvement in the east appears in M. Piccirillo, “Gregorio e le province orientali di Palestina e Arabia,” *Lib.ann* 54 (2004): 321–41.

181 Pope Martin, *Epistola ad Theodorum*, PL 87:164–65.

172 Crowfoot, “Christian Churches” and Biebel, “Mosaics,” 312–13.

173 Welles, “Inscriptions,” 474 (inscription 293). See note 158 for the other churches that invoke Bishop Paul.

174 Ibid.

175 Bishop Genesios is known from a church inscription dated to 611; *ibid.*, 486–87 (inscription 335).

176 For the Church of the Bishop Marianos, dated to 570, see M. Gawlikowski and A. Musa, “The Church of the Bishop Marianos,” in *Jerash Archaeological Project 1981–1983*, ed. F. Zayadine (Amman, 1986), 137–61.

A parallel, though less developed, case study concerns the church of Jabaliyah on the outskirts of modern Gaza, a site that demonstrates three consecutive building phases in the fourth, sixth, and eighth centuries.<sup>182</sup> The two sixth-century phases, dated to 532 and 543, identify the incumbent bishop as Markinos, the bishop of Gaza known principally from the encomium of the orator of Chorikios of Gaza, but also as a signatory to the Synod of Jerusalem in 536, which ratified the earlier teachings of Chalcedon.<sup>183</sup> Like the “Cathedral Church” of Gerasa, the mosaic schemes of the church of Jabaliyah were also subject to iconoclast intervention.<sup>184</sup>

Beyond Gerasa and Gaza, Mount Nebo’s particular association with the Chalcedonian “Melkites” evidently continued into the ninth century, for the tomb is listed as one of a number of Chalcedonian churches in the region in the *Kitāb al-Burhān* of Peter of Bayt Ra’s.<sup>185</sup> The sixth-century bishops Sergios and Leontios, in the dedications of Mount Nebo noted earlier, also securely link this site with the iconoclast churches of Kastron Mefa’a and Madaba, whose earlier bishop, Gaianos, signed the edicts of Chalcedon through the proxy of Constantine, metropolitan of Bostra.<sup>186</sup> The emergence of Bishop Job, in the dedication of the “Theotokos Chapel” of Ayn al-Kanisah near Mount Nebo and in Hagios Stephanos in Kastron Mefa’a, appears to confirm this connection until 756.

Peter of Bayt Ra’s also lists two other churches with identified iconoclast intervention, Jabal Harun and Kursi, as sites that appear to have been placed under the custody of the Chalcedonian Melkite church by the ninth century.<sup>187</sup> Two further descriptions of Jabal Harun by al-Mas’udi also note continued Chalcedonian “Melkite” control of the tomb of Aaron (“Hagios Aaron”), located at the summit of the mountain above the monastery, into the 940s.<sup>188</sup>

Establishing whether any of these sites was in Chalcedonian custody throughout the period of iconoclast activity following the 720s is admittedly impossible. Our knowledge of the episcopal networks that continued to function throughout the Umayyad period remains shadowy, and evidence to link many of the churches in the corpus to a known authority is limited. The possibility that iconoclasm emerged from factional groups within the broader Chalcedonian community, whose existence has been well noted by Juan Signes Codoñer, cannot be discounted; nor can the likelihood that other confessional groups may have been entangled in the debate.<sup>189</sup> It is perhaps too early to say. The evident correlation of churches that once situated themselves under Chalcedonian authority with the known episodes of iconoclasm does, however, indicate that our view of the phenomenon as a somewhat haphazard development, linked to disparate rural or urban groups, needs to be reconsidered. Equally, the recognition of particular bishops by certain communities, and the appearance of iconoclast activity in many of the major ecclesiastical and monastic structures of the region, strongly imply that the impetus for the removal of images was generated internally within the Christian community rather than through external coercion, and it seems to have been associated particularly with the Chalcedonians.

## Rethinking Palestinian Iconoclasm

What, then, should we identify as the cause of Palestinian iconoclasm? In view of the many difficulties with the existing material data set, archaeological material offers an imperfect perspective from which to identify its underlying social or theological stimulus. What this article has aimed to demonstrate, however, is that a more contextual reading of mosaic iconoclasm, with respect to both its architectural and regional context and its relationship to other data (such as epigraphy), is crucial for constructing a more nuanced profile of iconoclast communities. This approach will need to be part of our analysis of any new additions to the corpus in the coming decades.

Further, the complexity of the data that emerges from such observations offers a useful counterbalance

182 For a brief discussion see Humbert, “Rivers of Paradise” (n. 31 above), 216–18.

183 Mansi 8:1173–74.

184 Humbert, “Rivers of Paradise,” 216.

185 Peter of Bayt Ra’s, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, 382 (ed. P. Cachia, *The Book of the Demonstration* [Louvain, 1960–61], 1:206, 2:162).

186 Mansi 6:167–68; R. Price and M. Gaddis, trans., *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon* (Liverpool, 2007), Session 6, line 435 (p. 232).

187 Peter of Bayt Ra’s, *Kitāb al-Burhān*: 321, 382 (ed. Cachia, 170, 202–5; trans. Watt, 137, 162).

188 Al-Mas’udi, *Kitāb al-Tanbih wa al-ishraf*, 143 (ed. De Goeje, 1894).

189 Signes-Codoñer, “Melkites and Icon Worship” (n. 21 above), 145–52.

to the current vogue for expansive theories by which Palestinian iconoclasm is currently explained. Indeed, the development frequently presents us with material and cases that either sit uncomfortably with, or often directly contradict, the explanations drawn from the secondary scholarly literature. These anomalies, however, shed important light on the debate about iconoclasm and the essential weaknesses of current explanations, which future searches for the “origins” of iconoclasm will need to acknowledge. Aside from the numerous reservations voiced in recent decades regarding the literary tradition of the “edict of Yazid,” the apparent geographical nucleation of iconoclast activity primarily in rural settlements often on the margins of Caliphal authority should caution against assuming that the opposition to images derived from centralized Umayyad legislative pressure or Muslim social coercion. The absence of parallel iconoclast activity further north in Jund Dimashq or the Jund Hims, both much closer to the caliphal power base in Damascus, or in any other region of the caliphate around 720, presents one anomaly that is difficult to unify with what is known about the physical extent of Palestinian iconoclasm. That the geographical contours of iconoclast distribution conform equally closely to the boundaries of Palaestina and Arabia, which likely remained ecclesiastical but certainly not Umayyad administrative units by the eighth century, lends further weight to the argument that Palestinian iconoclasm originated as a dispute within the institutional church rather than with Yazid.

At an individual site level, the material corpus recovered from churches similarly offers little support for attributing iconoclast intervention to caliphal mandate. Images were evidently removed from church floors while closely observing the subtle distinction between liturgical and secular uses of the church’s interior space, a spatial distinction not matched in the more indiscriminate traditions presented by the edict itself (regardless of whether it can be considered authentic).

That the impact of Muslim coercion may have diffused gradually to rural settlements from urban centers is plausible. But the precise and systematic manner in which mosaic images were removed in various regional contexts (where evidence of a substantial Muslim presence is generally lacking) implies that the impetus for iconoclast activity must have come from an authority with more developed links to rural communities. The church and its clerical retinue represent the

most plausible of these social institutions that we may identify for the early to mid-eighth century.

In light of this, it is impossible to ignore, as Henry Maguire has recently noted, that our only indication of a concern about images that runs chronologically parallel to Palestinian mosaic iconoclasm is that which emanated from within the Chalcedonian church in the region in response to Byzantine imperial policy.<sup>190</sup> The general extent of the opposition in this region can only be guessed at, although it is clear from the response of John, Patriarch of Jerusalem, and his associate John of Damascus that some of the most vocal opposition arose from within the Jerusalemite milieu.<sup>191</sup> The two apologies that can be securely attributed to John of Damascus, a figure traditionally linked to Mar Sabas but possibly based in Mar Chariton or the Church of the Anastasis, provide the only written testimony for this formalized position on images to come from the region.<sup>192</sup>

To be clear, we cannot pinpoint the exact year in which the Jerusalem Patriarchate launched its opposition to imperial policy, especially in view of the careful qualifications of Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, who propose that John of Damascus’s second apology was composed as late as the 750s.<sup>193</sup> The works’ rather vague allusions to contemporary events inhibit a more nuanced dating in the context of Constantinopolitan and Palestinian iconoclasm, and in any case these merely provide the earliest surviving evidence of what resulted from a more protracted period of opposition. Both the sermons and mosaic iconoclasm, however, may be placed roughly contemporary with one another in the two decades between the 730s and 750s.

As we have seen, readings of the dedication of the Jabaliyah mosaic at Gaza (laid in 732) and the possible destruction phases at some iconoclast churches (such as Horvat Hanot, Jabal Harun, and Kursi) in the Golan earthquake of 749, may narrow this bracket

190 Maguire, “Moslems, Christians, and Iconoclasm” (n. 5 above), 117–19.

191 John of Damascus was condemned in the Horos of 754; Mansi 8:356C–D.

192 John of Damascus, *De imaginibus oratio I and De imaginibus oratio II*, in B. Kotter, ed., *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos III* (Berlin, 1975). A translation appears in A. Louth, trans., *Three Treatises on the Divine Images: St. John of Damascus* (Crestwood, NY, 2003).

193 Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: History* (n. 5 above), 183–87.



approximately to the years 733–49.<sup>194</sup> In any case, the examples of the “Theotokos Chapel” in Ayn al-Kanisah, where the iconoclast interventions had been completed before 762, and the replacement of the chancel scheme of Hagios Stephanos, Kastron Mefa’a by a geometric program in 756 indicate that in some regions iconoclast activity had ceased by around 750. In this respect, the example of Hagios Stephanos anticipates a marked shift from animate to geometric forms in mosaics commissioned after the 750s, which can also be observed in the Church of the Theotokos in Madaba (767), at Mar Elyas (776), and at Khirbet es-Shubeika (785/801/2).<sup>195</sup> That this shift can be observed in two churches under the jurisdiction of the episcopate of Madaba may not be coincidental. If, then, we accept the refined dating of the phenomenon to 733–49, after which all subsequent mosaic dedications eschewed animate forms, the removal of mosaic images from churches may have coincided broadly with a period in which some members of the Jerusalem Patriarchate began to mobilize their opposition to imperial iconoclast policy in Constantinople.<sup>196</sup>

Approaches to John of Damascus’s orations in defense of icons have remained more dismissive of their relationship (even indirectly) to Palestinian iconoclasm. One reason is that such actions are not mentioned directly or mandated in John’s writing. Whereas John roundly condemned imperial hostility to sacred portraiture, the removal and neutralization of secular and natural themes were not explicitly addressed by his surviving apologiae. The other reason reflects the general treatment of John of Damascus’s compositions as productions and responses to a Constantinopolitan rather than a Palestinian intellectual milieu, which has generated an impression of many of John’s compositions as abstract arguments rather than points directed explicitly at his contemporaries in Palaestina itself.<sup>197</sup>

However, as Henry Maguire recently noted, both of John’s works in defense of sacred portraiture are replete with references to the inappropriate veneration of

images of people, animals, and birds and historical episodes of biblical idolatry.<sup>198</sup> This reserve appears to have originated in the earliest iconodule theology of images established by John, and evidently was firmly embedded in John’s thinking about the defense of holy portraits. It is a theme to which he returns in both of his apologies. John’s first treatise drew upon the familiar theme of the Golden calf and the proscriptions of the Book of Exodus against the making of idolatrous images that could be subject to worship (*latreia*) and veneration (*proskynesis*). Later, in a more developed form, John returned to the same theme of idolatry in his second apology, combining the earlier account of the Golden calf, with the observations of St. Paul, in Romans 1.23, that detailed the idolatrous practices of his own day.

“And the Lord spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of his words and you did not see any likeness, but only a voice,” and a little later, “take good heed to your soul, for you did not see a likeness on the day, when the Lord spoke to you on Horeb in the mountain in the midst of the fire. Beware lest you act lawlessly and make for yourselves a carved likeness, any image, a likeness of a male or a female, a likeness of any beast that is upon the earth, a likeness of any winged bird” and so on, and after a little, “Beware lest you look up in the sky and see the sun and the moon and the stars and all the order of heaven, and being led astray venerate them and worship them [αὐτοῖς καὶ λατρεύσης αὐτοῖς].”

You see that the single purpose of this is that one should not worship, or offer the veneration of worship, to creation instead of the Creator, but only to the One who fashioned all. Therefore everywhere it concerns worship by veneration [Διὸ πανταχῇ συνάπτει τῇ προσκυνήσει τὴν λατρείαν]. Again it says, “There shall be for you no other gods besides me, You shall not make for yourself a carved [image] nor any likeness, you shall not venerate them nor shall you worship them, for I am the Lord your God.”<sup>199</sup>

194 On the dating see notes 101–11.

195 See note 3.

196 Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: History*, 187–89, 273–74.

197 See S. Griffith, “John of Damascus and the Church in Syria in the Umayyad Era: The Intellectual and Cultural Milieu of Orthodox Christians in the World of Islam,” *Hugoye* 11, no. 2 (2008): 207–37.

198 Maguire, “Moslems, Christians, and Iconoclasm,” 119.

199 John of Damascus, *De imaginibus oratio* 1.6; Louth, *Three Treatises*, 23.

And that they did venerate idols as gods, listen to what Scripture says in the Exodus of the sons of Israel, when Moses went up on to Mount Sinai and was there for some time, waiting to receive the law from God, when the senseless people rose up against the servant of God, Aaron, saying, “Make us gods to go before us; as for this man, Moses, we do not know what has become of him.” Then, when they had taken off the ornaments of the women and melted them down, they ate and drank and became drunk with wine and illusion and, in their folly, began to play, saying, “These are your gods, Israel.” You see that they had idols as gods. For they did not make an idol of Zeus or one of the other gods, but, as it happened, they gave the gold to make an idol, whatever it might be, and there was set up an ox-headed image. So they took these images in cast metal for gods and venerated them as gods, images that were the dwelling-places of demons. And the divine apostle also says that they venerated the creation instead of the Creator: “they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for a corruptible human likeness and the likeness of birds and quadrupeds and reptiles and they worshipped the creation instead of the Creator.” For this reason, God prohibited any likeness, as Moses says in Deuteronomy, “And the Lord spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of his words and you did not see any likeness, but only a voice,” and a little later, “take good heed to your soul, for you did not see a likeness on the day, when the Lord spoke to you on Horeb in the mountain in the midst of the fire. Beware lest you act lawlessly and make for yourself a carved likeness, any image, a likeness of a male or a female, a likeness of any beast that is upon the earth, a likeness of any winged bird” and so on, and after a little, “Beware lest you look up in the sky and see the sun and the moon and the stars and all the order of heaven, and being led astray venerate them and worship them.”<sup>200</sup>

In John’s conception of the history of Christian revelation these represented the era prior to the Incarnation, before God had become visible through the incarnation in the person of Christ. John’s specific use of this defense thus served to draw the question of images into well-established Christological debate. For John, the Incarnation permitted, if not mandated, the creation and veneration of holy portraits over images drawn from the mundane world, which represented the true form of the creator. This sense of transition between the old and new worlds is developed further in John’s apologies by drawing upon the descriptions of the decoration of Solomon’s Temple described in the Book of Kings, once replete with images of animals and plants, which to John had been surpassed by the true images of Christ, his mother and the armies of saints, that represented more appropriate images to adorn the church.

God ordered David to build him a house through his own son Solomon and to prepare his resting-place. Solomon built this and made cherubim, as the book of Kingdoms says, and covered the cherubim with gold and made engravings all around the walls in the form of cherubim and phoenixes<sup>201</sup> both inside and out—not, he said, on the sides, but “all around”—and also oxen and lions and pomegranates. Are not all the walls of the house of the Lord made much more valuable when adorned with the forms and images of saints, rather than animals and trees? Where is the declaration of the law: “You shall not make any likeness”? But Solomon, who was filled with wisdom, did not depict God, when he made likenesses of cherubim and lions and oxen—for this the law forbids—should not we, who do depict God, make images of the saints? For, just as then the temple and the people were sanctified with the blood of animals and the ashes of a heifer, now it is with the blood of Christ “who bore witness before Pontius Pilate” and showed himself the firstfruits of the martyrs, and still the church is built by the holy blood of the saints, so as then the house of God was adorned with forms and images of animals, so

200 John of Damascus, *De imaginibus oratio* 2.8; Louth, *Three Treatises*, 64–65.

201 Or palm trees. See Louth, *Three Treatises*, 33 n. 57.

now with saints who have prepared themselves in the spirit to be living and rational temples for the dwelling-place of the living God.<sup>202</sup>

The temple that Solomon built was dedicated with the blood of animals and adorned with the images of animals, of lions and bulls and phoenixes<sup>203</sup> and pomegranates. Now the Church is dedicated by the blood of Christ and his saints and adorned with an image of Christ and his saints. Either do away with any veneration of matter or do not innovate, “neither remove the ancient boundaries, set in place by your fathers. . . .”<sup>204</sup>

Unlike later iconophile writers, John is not explicit in equating the decoration of church interiors with animals and people with idolatry, although the nascent belief that such images evoked the practices of the pre-Incarnation past is clear in his writing.<sup>205</sup> Nevertheless, both orations reflect John’s preoccupation with the question of idolatry as a component of his own attempt to justify the performance of proskynesis before holy portraits and his use of biblical pages that were to become important to later iconophile arguments a few decades later. The passages from Exodus and Romans 1.28 he uses also identify a number of visual subjects—humans, birds, lions, and oxen—that echo the subjects most commonly excised from mosaic schemes in church floors. Similar concerns over images of animals and birds, which paraphrased the earlier proscriptions against idolatry in Exodus and Romans 1.23, were later enlisted among the supporting arguments of the Second Council of Nikaia in 787.<sup>206</sup> If we accept the two apologies as products of the 740s and 750s respectively, John’s

own use of these scriptural passages relating to idolatry formed an active component of his opposition to imperial iconoclasm emanating from Palaestina for at least a decade before the Council of Hieria in 754, and throughout the period in which mosaic iconoclasm within Palaestina and Arabia appears to have occurred. These represent the beginnings of critiques and defenses that were to be sustained by the iconodule camp beyond the 750s.<sup>207</sup>

John’s orations, of course, do not formally condemn the use of profane subjects in the decoration of church space, and cannot be explicitly linked to the iconoclastic phenomenon known from floor mosaics. Yet it is important to note that John’s careful distinction between sacred portraits of Christ, the Theotokos, and the saints, which alone were deserving of veneration, from those of animals and ordinary people, would have created an obvious tension between the position he defined and the established decorative traditions of church buildings inhabited within the Jerusalem Patriarchate and those of the former province of Arabia. As Henry Maguire has also noted, the themes of beasts and humans, reminiscent of the decoration of Solomon’s Temple, practices that John sought to distinguish from the veneration due only to the Christian sacred, were ubiquitous in church buildings of the former provinces of Palaestina and Arabia by the eighth century and did not segregate sacred and mundane portraiture to distinct spaces or architectural registers.<sup>208</sup> John’s arguments were especially difficult to sustain in relation to the bema, where images of bowing oxen, deer, and personifications of rivers and seasons frequently co-occurred with crosses and holy portraits and often adorned the spaces central to liturgical rite, that were the focal point of proskynesis.<sup>209</sup> However, clearly defined John’s own theological stance on images may have been, his measured approach essentially contradicted the

202 John of Damascus, *De imaginibus oratio* 1:20; Louth, *Three Treatises*, 33–34.

203 Or palm trees.

204 John of Damascus, *De imaginibus oratio* 2:15; Louth, *Three Treatises*, 72.

205 John of Damascus, *De imaginibus* 1:20; Louth, *Three Treatises*, 33–34.

206 Mansi 13:285C–D. A translation of the relevant passage appears in D. J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm* (Toronto, 1986), 110–11. This was also noted in Maguire, “Moslems, Christians, and Iconoclasm,” 118.

207 Reports of further synods in Jerusalem condemning Byzantine iconoclast policy are known from Schick, *Christian Communities* (n. 5 above), 210–11.

208 Maguire “Moslems, Christians, and Iconoclasm,” 119.

209 Good examples of this trend include the Church of the Lions, the Church of the Palm Tree, and the Church of the Rivers in Kastron Mefa’a and the “New Baptistry” and “Theotokos Chapel” of Mount Nebo, where the bema schemes featured a variety of human, animal, or avian motifs. Photographs of these schemes are reproduced in Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, 150–51, 236–41. All of these were later subject to iconoclast intervention.



social practices of the Christian community in which he existed. If, as Leslie Brubaker has argued, the destruction of images represents “a power play directed against the past and its baggage,” Palestinian iconoclasm may encapsulate that attempt, and a moment when the collective weight of the pre-Christian iconographic repertoire was targeted for suppression.<sup>210</sup>

We cannot fully know the intended outcomes of the iconoclast process, for Palestinian iconoclasm is a phenomenon frozen at the point of transition. We know its origins and motives well from the numerous animated schemes that survive in the region. But its end, what the iconoclasts envisioned would replace the “images of the past,” is less certain. Many of the iconoclast churches were abandoned within a century of these interventions, victims of the collapse of the Christian patron economies that characterized the ninth and tenth centuries, and few appear to have been substantially altered in these intervening decades.<sup>211</sup> Such rapid rates of abandonment mean that we are fortunate in being able to identify the phenomenon before all traces of it were removed, but also that the effective end of the iconoclast story cannot be fully known. If the increasing vogue for geometric floor designs after the 750s, the preservation of crosses, and the fragmentary apse schemes among a number of churches are telling, Palestinian iconoclasm represents an attempt by Christian communities to effectively streamline the visual environment in a manner that conforms roughly to the principles articulated by writers like John of Damascus, and aimed at reinforcing the centrality of the sacred image. John’s particular concerns with idolatry, and the historical examples of beasts and birds that he occasionally invoked, conform closely to the images excised from the floor mosaics of churches, and the indications are that churches, likely of John’s own Chalcedonian community in places like Gerasa and Madaba, were also systematically occupied with similar anxieties in the same decades leading up to 750. It is impossible, however, to know whether John himself incited this phenomenon or merely emerged from a broader intellectual context in which such concerns were widely held in the region in the opening decades of the eighth century. A great deal of debate remains to establish the audience for

John’s works in the context of the Palestinian, rather than Constantinopolitan, intellectual and ecclesiastical milieu. John’s orations and the episodes of mosaic iconoclasm, nevertheless allude to a time in the second quarter of the eighth century when a number of Chalcedonian Christians attached to the Jerusalem Patriarchate were evidently seeking to question the legitimacy of the types of images that adorned their own churches.


In this light, it is difficult to understand Palestinian iconoclasm as a linear assimilation with Islamic principles. Indeed, it is possible that the renewed focus on the sacred Christian image, bound up in the doctrine of the Incarnation, may in contrast have firmly demarcated the growing distinction between established and emerging Christian and Muslim beliefs. We cannot discount the possibility that this was an equally intentional outcome of the iconoclast process. Rather, suppressing the idolatrous images of the past may have been fundamental to establishing a more coherent and distinct Christian orthodox identity in view of an increasingly cohesive Islamic counter narrative.

This conclusion will prove difficult to swallow, for it will require us to reengage once more with questions about the interplay between Christian communities and Umayyad authorities, both in terms of Christian cultural and intellectual horizons in the eighth-century Bilad al-Sham, and equally the extent to which Umayyad political and social pressures were able to penetrate and influence such communities, even in regions traditionally viewed as their administrative heartlands. Palestinian iconoclasm facilitates these debates, rather than offers their solution. But if we can articulate them, they may transform our understanding of this dynamic for all future studies of the period.

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210 Brubaker, “Making and Breaking Images” (n. 5 above), 13.

211 Reynolds, “Monasticism and Christian Pilgrimage” (n. 3 above), 289–97.

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